

***Silence*, directed by Martin Scorsese On the Crossroads of History and Fiction**

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The Martin Scorsese film *Silence* is a fairly faithful adaptation of a novel of the same name written by the Japanese writer Endō Shūsaku (1923-1996) in 1966. Previous academic reviews of this film have provided excellent hindsight into the historical background surrounding the events it depicts.¹ However, while the book *Silence* is based on some research, above all, it is a work of fiction; that is, historical elements are largely adapted to fit the purpose of the story.

As one can infer from Endō's various testimonies and also from Scorsese's foreword found in a recent English edition,² both the book and the film were designed to present a spiritual theme : to show the challenges of faith in the modern world. Scorsese considers these challenges as a whole. Endō focusses on the particular challenges for a Japanese Christian. In this review, we will not only present, briefly, the historical context around *Silence*, but also assess Endō's and Scorsese's motives. In each case, we will consider how their motives had an impact on their depictions of history.

Historical Context

The story is set around the year 1640, in Japan. Almost a century had passed since Christianity was brought to the country by one of the first Jesuits, Francisco Xavier, in 1549. The Mission initiated by the Society of Jesus prospered in the first decades and the number of converted Japanese grew to attain as much as 3 or 4 percent of the population; this number is more than three times what it is today.³

¹ See Christoph Wagenseil, "Der Überlebenskampf des Christentums im „Sumpf“ Japans? Christliche Bewegungen zwischen japanischem Buddhismus und portugiesischem Katholizismus", March 17, 2017: <http://www.remid.de/blog/2017/03/der-ueberlebenskampf-des-christentums-im-sumpf-japans-christliche-bewegungen-zwischen-japanischem-buddhismus-und-portugiesischem-katholizismus/> In his comments, Wagenseil provides references to most academic reviews of the film in Western languages.

² Martin Scorsese, "Foreword," in Shūsaku Endō, William Johnston (trad.), *Silence*, Picador Modern Classics Tie-in Edition, 2017, p. V–VII.

³ For the number, see Shōsuke Murai, "Chikyūteki sekai no seiritsu (Birth of the so-called global world)", in *Nihon no taigai kankei*, 5 ed., Yasunori Arano, Tōkyō, Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2013, p. 1–51

However, with the centralization of local political power since the mid-sixteenth century that followed a period of long civil wars inside the Japanese archipelago, authorities banned the practice of the Catholic faith from the whole country. At that time, the main destination of the missionaries shifted to China or to Southeast Asia. In Europe, Japan became the subject of hagiographical stories of heroic Christian martyrs who had been the targets of cruel “persecutions” conducted by oriental “tyrants.” It was thus no longer an actual field of evangelization. Under these circumstances, European missionaries could only enter the country clandestinely – just as Sebastião Rodrigues and Francisco Garrpe are depicted in the film.

Endō himself actually studied the history of Japanese Christianity under one of the best specialists of his time, the Jesuit Hubert Cieslik, who was a professor at the Sophia University in Tōkyō. The general context in the film is thus concordant with what contemporary sources tell us. However, as in most fictional works, depicting actual history was not his goal, and many details were adapted or modified to better fit the story. He follows a very complex narration scheme, sometimes using a third-person point of view, and most of the book relates the view of the main protagonist, mostly through letters.

For example, one of the characters, the apostate Cristóvão Ferreira (1580-1650) really existed. He was indeed a Jesuit active in the seventeenth century, and his life was very close to what Endō depicts. He did send letters to Europe, and some are still available today. However, the plot device setting the whole story in motion, a presumed letter written by Ferreira in 1633 that is shown in the first scene of the film, was entirely – and quite expertly – created by Endō.⁴

The Missionaries

In the book, Endō uses a similar blend of history and fiction on several occasions. In fact, the main character, Sebastião Rodrigues, Rodrigo in the film, is the alter ego of an actual historical figure, an Italian Jesuit called Giuseppe Chiara (1602–1685). Alongside such characters based on history, we also find purely fictional characters, such as Francisco Garrpe, who was invented by Endō in order to provide a contrast with Rodrigo.

The event that brings the two missionaries to Japan, Ferreira’s apostasy, is also confirmed by both Japanese and European contemporary sources. After this event, he took a Japanese name, Sawano Chūan; he remained in Japan until his death. Endō actively researched this character, and he actually met one of his descendants, who had moved the tombstone to its current location in Yanaka, Tōkyō.⁵

Historical documents tell us that information on Ferreira’s apostasy arrived in Rome

⁴ Father Valignano (1539–1606) S.J. was a leading figure of Jesuit mission in Japan. In the book he is present in Rome, but in the film he is shown in Macao. Since he died in 1606, he could not have been present when Rodrigues and Garrpe started their journey, as is depicted in the film.

⁵ Shūsaku Endō, “Ferreira (Sawano Chūan)”, in Shūsaku Endō, *Kirishitan-jidai : Jyunkyō to Kikyō no rekishi (The Time of Christians: the History of Martyrs and Apostasies)* (Tōkyō, Shōgakukan, 1994), p. 105–123. Shūsaku Endō, “Chinmoku - Fumie ga sodateta sōzō (Silence - imagination started from Fumie),” *idem*, p. 35–40.

around 1636;⁶ the news caused a scandal that was important not only for the Jesuits, but also for the Church as a whole. Many had trouble believing it – as Rodrigo and Garrpe do in the film. Later on a Chinese trade ship from Nagasaki to Tonkin allegedly brought the news of his death as a martyr;⁷ this time, after a change of heart, the official discourse adopted this version of events.⁸ Thus, Ferreira’s honor was restored and later European sources started depicting Ferreira as a hero who ultimately died for his faith.⁹ The transformation of his image from a disgraceful apostate to a heroic martyr was important in the Catholic Church’s narrative construction of an idealized image of a Christian Japan.¹⁰

However, in 1643 – before this change took place – a group of people was actually sent to verify what really had happened to Ferreira; again, this is just like Rodrigo and Garrpe in the film. Among them was Giuseppe Chiara, along with around ten companions¹¹. Contrary to what is described in Endō’s story, the missionaries were not able to make contact with actual Japanese Christians. In fact, while they made efforts to dress as local people, they were immediately discovered as soon as they appeared, due to their “big noses,” and captured after a quick boat chase.¹²

After his arrest, Chiara was finally convinced to abandon his faith. He took a Japanese name, Okamoto San’emon, married, and died a relatively well-off man after more than forty years in the country.¹³ This contrasts sharply with depictions of him as a martyr that were created in Europe at the same time.¹⁴ His apostasy is mentioned in the archives of the Jesuits in Rome, as well as in several Japanese sources (*Kirshitoki* 契利斯督記¹⁵ *Sayo-yoroku* 査訳余録¹⁶ and *Tsuko-ichiran* 通航一覽), which we know Endō used to write *Silence*.

⁶ He was excommunicated from the Society of Jesus as a result. Hubert Cieslik, “The Case of Christovão Ferreira,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1974) : 1–54.

⁷ Kiichi Matsuda, “Ferreira no shijitsu (Ferreira’s historical reality)”, in Kiichi Matsuda, *Nanbanjunrei*, Tōkyō, Asahi-shinbunsha, 1967, p. 189–202.

⁸ For an example, see Archivio de Propaganda Fide, code: SOCG. vol. 107, f. 50r–50v, letter from Diego Collado, May 31, 1636.

⁹ Matthias Tanner, *Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem militans*, 1675, p. 428 ; “First, he apostatized his Christian faith due to his torments. However, after his eightieth anniversary, he had a change of heart. He was then awfully seized because (of his faith) in Christ and killed, suspended by his feet over a small pit. In Japan, year 1652” (Translated from Latin to English by the author).

¹⁰ See Jacques Proust, *L’Europe au prisme du Japon, XVI^e-XVII^e siècle : entre humanisme, Contre-Réforme et Lumières*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1997, p. 75–76.

¹¹ Fukusai Hasayhi (ed.), *Tsūkō ichiran*, t. 5, Tōkyō, Kokusho kankōkai, 1912, p. 92–112: here p. 93. *Tsūkō ichiran* is the name of the collection of 350 volumes of diplomatic texts in Edo period, and printed in the Meiji period.

¹² *Tsūkō-ichiran*, p. 97.

¹³ He was able to leave an estate of 28 “ryō” d’argent to his Japanese widow. 1 “ryō” was equivalent to the amount of the annual salary of a female servant at that time.

¹⁴ The text written on his portrait conserved in his hometown in Sicily says this : “He died of a particularly awful death, his neck pierced by sharpened bamboo sticks. After a long suffering he returned to the heavens and obtained the glory of martyrdom around the year.” *Catholic Weekly Online*, June 24, 2016 : http://www.cathoshin.com/news/chinmoku-chiara/11092#_jmp0

¹⁵ Included now in *Zoku-Zoku-Gunsho-ruijū (Continuation of the supplement of the thematic collection of historic)*, vol. 13, Tōkyo, Kokushokankōkai, 1907, p. 626–668.

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 598–625. There is a German translation of this document. Gustav Voss, and Hubert Cieslik, eds., *Kirishito-Ki und Sayō-Yoroku: Japanische Dokumente zur Missionsgeschichte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tōkyō, Sophia University, 1940.

Endō's active use of history in his writing process is even clearer in the last part of the novel, a pseudo-historical document called *Journal of an officer attached to the Christian's house*. Somewhat misleadingly, the English translation presents this as an appendix, but it is actually a document created by Endō, who masterfully imitated the writing style of old administrative diaries.¹⁷ Endō himself said that the reason he placed this at the end of the book was to suggest that even in their later years, Rodrigo and his Japanese servant Kichijirō were in fact weak men who kept repeating the same process.¹⁸ They came back to their faith many times, only to apostatize again whenever they felt in danger.¹⁹ The author of the script of the film, Jay Cocks, had a Japanese friend retranslate this part during the redaction process. Scorsese's film thus includes a few scenes depicting Rodrigo's last years. In Shinoda Masahiro's older version these scenes are omitted. In the film, they are told from an external point of view, which reflects how it is presented in the book.²⁰

Despite his efforts to pursue a certain historical realism, Endō omits some aspects of Chiara and Ferreira's legacy from his narrative, and these are also omitted in the film. Most importantly, there is no mention of their contribution to Japanese culture. As seen in the movie, they did play important roles not only in censoring Christian materials, but also in transmitting Western knowledge, such as astronomy, to the country.²¹ Endō wanted to show the conflictual relationship that resulted from having both a Japanese and Christian identity; he was not interested in their assimilation to the local way of life, which happened only after they abandoned their faith, at least on the surface.²²

Kichijirō, the Judas

This orientation is best shown through the most important Japanese character in the story, Kichijirō. This extremely interesting figure was probably based on one of Chiara's Japanese retainers.²³ While he can be seen, on the outside, as a fairly archetypal man without principles, his role in the book is best summarized by Endō himself, who affirms that: "Kichijirō is me".²⁴ He meant that this extremely weak person, who was unable to die for his faith despite being given multiple chances to do so, mirrored his own struggles.²⁵ As Scorsese says in his foreword, he is the "Judas,"

¹⁷ Toshihiko Miyao, "Notes on Endō's *Silence*: 'The Diary of an Officer at the Christian Residence' and 'Additional Entries on Christians'," in *The Journal of Nagano-Ken Junior College*, 36, 1981, p. 7–12.

¹⁸ Van C. Gessel and Shūsaku Endō, *Endō Shūsaku to Shūsaku Endō: Silences and Voices. The Writings of Shūsaku Endō*, Tōkyō, Shunjū-sha, 1994, p. 99–100.

¹⁹ Interview of Endō Shūsaku by Miyoshi Ikuo, "Bungaku – Jyakusha no ronri (Literature – the logic for the weak)," in *Kokubungaku* 18, no.2, February 1973, p. 10–29.

²⁰ Interview with Jay Cocks, *Rollingstone Japan*, Jan. 20, 2017, <http://rollingstonejapan.com/articles/detail/27549/1/1/1>

²¹ On the role of missionaries, and especially Giuseppe Chiara, on astronomy in Japan, see Takashi Gono, *Kirishitan no Bunka (The Japanese Christian Culture)*, Tōkyō, Yoshikawakōbunkan, 2012, p. 127–131.

²² Jacques Proust, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

²³ Kichijirō probably corresponds to one of Chiara's retainers called Tsuno'ichi. However, he was from the Echizen province (around the actual Kanazawa) and not from the Gotō island. According to records, he was killed in his own garden when his Christian faith was discovered.

²⁴ See the answers given by Endō after the ceremony where he received an honorary doctoral degree from a Jesuit institution, John Carroll University. Van C. Gessel and Shūsaku Endō, *op. cit.*, p. 84

²⁵ Endō himself confessed that he himself would not have had the courage to be martyred, if he was born

the one who doubts, and his presence draws both a sharp contrast and a fascinating parallel with Rodrigo, who wants to become a martyr but is not allowed to. Due to his symbolic and narrative functions, he can be considered as a central character in the story. In the context of Scorsese's films, one could draw an interesting parallel with the depiction of Judas seen in *The Last Temptation of the Christ* (1988), who also doubts Jesus, albeit for completely different reasons.

Governor Inoue and His Dialogue with Rodrigo

The next important Japanese character is Governor Masashige Inoue (1585–1661). Inoue is an actual historical figure, who served as an inquisitor for Christian matters from 1639 to 1658 and indeed interrogated Giuseppe Chiara. The book and movie tend to depict him as a rational, but cruel character, who did not hesitate to kill many Japanese Christians in order to force the missionaries to apostatize. This image would better fit his predecessor, Takenaka Uneme. Japanese historical sources describe Inoue as a far more moderate person, who did not promote extreme torture and was more inclined to try to solve situations peacefully.²⁶ While Inoue did enforce controls on Christians,²⁷ he was also very interested in Western knowledge and fought to maintain a commercial relationship with the Dutch.²⁸

His dialogue with Rodrigo was completely created by Endō, and it is faithfully depicted in the film.²⁹ Most arguments used by Inoue can be found in a book by Arnoldus Montanus, published in Europe in the late seventeenth century. In this book we can find what is presented as the testimony of a Dutch merchant present at the time of Chiara's trial. It is the case of the almost theological objection to God's omnipotence, which is said to be proven to be untrue by the actual situation in Japan.³⁰

The Japanese proceedings of this interrogation can also be seen in a source called the *Kirishitoki*. However, the rhetoric used to persuade Chiara and his companions is slightly different. It focuses on the absence of miracles after another missionary's

during such time. Shūsaku Endō, "Ihōjin no kunō (Align's struggle)," in Muneya Katō (ed.), *Endō Shūsaku Bungakuron shū: Shūkyū-hen (Anthology of Endō Shūsaku's literary commentaries: Religious topics)*, (Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 2009), p. 143–161.

²⁶ Shūsaku Endō, "Ferreira (Sawano Chuan)." L. Blussé, "The Grand Inquisitor Inoue Chikugono Kami Masashige, Spin Doctor of the Tokugawa Bakufu," *Bulletin of Portuguese/Japanese Studies* 7 (2003): 23–43. Regarding the issue of torture, Endō probably mostly relied on the work of one of his comrades at Hubert Cieslik's lessons in Sophia, Simon Miura, with whom he coedited a book on Christianity in Japan. Endō and Miura, *Kirishitan jidai no chishikijin (Japanese Intellectuals in the Christian Period)*, Tōkyō, Nihonkeizaishinbunsha, 1967.

²⁷ Hasegawa Kazuo "Ōmetsuke Inoue Chikugo no kami Masashige no seiyō igaku e no kanshin (Governor Masashige Inoue's Interest in Western Medicine)", in Iwao Seiichi (ed.) *Kinsei no yōgaku to kaigaikōshō*, Tōkyō: Gan'nandō shoten, 1979, p. 196–238.

²⁸ Also see Nagatsumi Yōko "Oranda-jin no hogosha to shite no Inoue Chikugo no kami Masashige (Governor Masashige Inoue as a patron of Dutch merchants)", in *Nihon rekishi*, 327, 1975, p. 1–17.

²⁹ This discussion between a missionary and the inquisitor - in that case Inoue and Ferreira - is also depicted in a play written by the Endō in 1966, the same year that *Silence* came out. See Endō Shūsaku, *The Golden Country*, trans. Francis Mathy, Tōkyō, Tuttle, 1970.

³⁰ Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Japonensis: Being Remarkable Addresses by way of Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Emperor of Japan*, London, Johnson, 1670, p. 357–358. Endō probably consulted this book.

death (p. 655). In the book and the film, very little is said about miracles. This is a major departure from actual historical sources, where they are omnipresent, especially the Western ones. Endō's story is more in line with a twentieth-century mentality, in the sense that he tends to avoid depicting paranormal or supernatural elements. However, such elements were very much part of the world view of missionaries in the seventeenth century.

The life of Marcello Mastrilli (1603–1637), the missionary mentioned by officials during their interrogation of Chiara, provides a very good example of this faith in miracles in the Catholic Church of the modern era.³¹ When he was still in Europe, this young Jesuit had a vision of Francisco Xavier himself, who inspired him to go seek martyrdom in Japan. Japanese reports affirm that the Christians believed that, when he died, the sky around Nagasaki became black. This spectacular miracle, coupled with Mastrilli's link with Xavier, made him a major figure in the Company, and a model for potential martyrs.

This could be why Chiara was deeply disturbed by the claims that the death of such an illustrious predecessor did not produce any miracles, and the Japanese records of the events could well be fairly accurate in this respect. In fact, neither the Japanese records nor Montanus' book contain the slightest mention of a local inquisitor using rhetoric similar to the swamp analogy present in the book and the film. According to this analogy, Japan was like a swamp to Christianity, where nothing of value would grow. Rather than reflecting actual historical fact, this depiction of the dialogue as an inherently conflictual situation involving two sides that are arguing for the validity of opposing world views on an almost philosophical level is more reflective of Endō's internal struggles.³² While Christianity was indeed criticized for its refusal to blend into local society, even the most virulent anti-Christian writers never went as far as to say that it was impossible for it to grow in Japan. Inoue's expression of this in the book and the movie contrasts with reality.³³

A Pornography of Torture?

This subordination to a pre-existing narrative is even more evident in the film's depiction of violence. The tortures at the hot springs of Mount Unzen were really practiced by Takenaka Uneme, Inoue's extremely sadistic predecessor, who also was the first to conduct both Fumi-e and the torture form called "ana-tsurushi." However, representations of this particular torture in the film are based on Western secondary sources, such as the writing of Mattias Tanner or Filippo Alegambe.³⁴ According to Anesaki Masaharu, the actual procedure was to bury someone at the bottom of a pit so that only their head protruded—in a way similar to what David Bowie's character

³¹ Ines G. Županov, "Passage to India: Jesuit Spiritual Economy between Martyrdom and Profit in the Seventeenth Century," in *Journal of Early Modern History* 16 (2012): 1–39.

³² Michihiro Yamane, *Endō Shūsaku sono jinsei to chinmoku no shinjitsu (Endō Shūsaku, his life and the background of "Silence")* (Tōkyō: Chōbunsha, 2005), p. 388.

³³ In fact Endō himself adds that this is only the opinion of this particular character (an opinion that, nevertheless, may well be ahistorical in the context of the seventeenth century) in the interview conducted by Van C. Gessel, Endō Shūsaku and Van C. Gessel, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³⁴ Philippe Alegambe, *Mortes illustres et gesta eorum de Societate Iesu, qui in odium fidei 1657*, p. 417–418. Cited by Cieslik, *op.cit.* See also footnote 9.

experiences in the film “Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence” (1983) by Ōshima Nagisa.³⁵

The book and especially the film clearly put an emphasis on spectacular torture scenes, but both neglect some methods that were historically attested and more effective. This was the case of a technique, actually performed on Chiara, which can be seen in the Japanese version of *Silence* by Masahiro Shinoda (1971).³⁶ It consisted in tempting the missionaries by leaving them alone in rooms with young Japanese women; if the missionary succumbed to temptation, he would be forced to marry the young woman.³⁷ Another method common in the Edo period and absent in the film is the wooden horse, or “chevalet”.³⁸ As a whole, while the Japanese authorities conducted severe persecutions and did use sadistic tortures, especially during Takenaka Uneme’s times, the government had changed its focus to a softer approach after 1628, and both Endō and Scorsese draw more from the imagination of the missionaries than from actual historical facts in their representations of such scenes.³⁹

This approach leads to a high amount of violence, both physical and psychological, on the screen. Idealized depictions of violence – or we could say a “Pornography of violence” – have long been seen as a typical trait of Japanese cinema, especially by Western amateurs (for example in some of Akira Kurosawa’s and Takeshi Kitano’s films). However, this association of Japan with the concept of refined violence has deeper roots in history. In fact, already in the modern period, Japanese martyrs had become a popular theme in Jesuits school dramas in Europe. Such plays were even performed more than 7650 times.⁴⁰ Most of them portray local authorities as cruel and sadistic figures, who share many traits with the depiction of Inoue’s character in the film. One good example is the play called *Christianomachia Japonensis*, which was shown in Luzern (Switzerland) in 1638, in almost the same period the film is set in. It features a series of horrific tortures, described in lavish detail in the script, scene after scene.⁴¹

³⁵ Anesaki Masaharu, “Psychological observations on the Persecutions of the Catholics in Japan in the Seventeenth Century,” in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 1 (1936): 13–27. Actually European depictions of Japanese tortures in the modern period, such as those by the famous Nicolas Trigault, were mainly based on techniques used in the Old continent.

³⁶ This is a tribute to a well-known series of films of the Showa period, starring Ichikawa Raizō 市川雷蔵 (1931–1969), and called *Nemuri Kyōshirō*. In the episode titled *Joyōken* 眠狂四郎女妖剣, we learn that the nihilistic protagonist, Nemuri, was in fact the son of an apostatized Catholic priest and a Japanese woman.

³⁷ We can find information about this in the Japanese source “Tsuko-ichiran”, p. 99.

³⁸ *Sayō-yoroku*, p. 603. The wooden horse was a typical torture device made of wood used not only in Japan but also in early modern Europe. Morihiko Fujisawa, *Nihon keibatsu fūzokuzushi (History of the Practices of Punishment in Japan)*, Tōkyō, Kokuyhokankokai, 2010, p. 255, picture p. 259. George Ryley Scott, *The History of Torture throughout the Ages*, London, Luxor Press, 1959, p. 169–171.

³⁹ In fact, such scenes are mainly based on Leon Pagès’s work, an extremely derivative source from the nineteenth century. Léon Pagès, *Histoire de la Religion chrétienne au Japon depuis 1598 jusqu’à 1651*, Paris, Charles Douniol, 1870.

⁴⁰ Ruprecht Wimmer, “Japan und China auf den Jesuitenbühnen des deutschen Sprachgebietes,” in Ruprecht Wimmer, and Adrian Hsia (eds.), *Mission und Theater: Japan und China auf den Bühnen der Gesellschaft Jesu*, Regensburg, Schnell und Steiner, 2005, p. 17–58.

⁴¹ Thomas Immoos, “Japanese Themes in Swiss Baroque Drama,” in *Studies in Japanese Culture*, ed. Joseph Roggendorf, Tōkyō, Sophia University, 1963, p. 79–98.

Furthermore, through the eighteenth century, the idea of Japan as a country ignoring the true faith, and thus epitomizing the concept of “oriental cruelty” was widespread in European literature.⁴² In a sense, the insistence on violence shown by the film, which goes in some cases beyond the book itself, belongs directly to this lineage of discourse.

The Interdiction of Christianity

Despite the fact that its central part, the swamp analogy, was Endō’s invention, the dialogue between Inoue and Rodrigo mostly succeeds in showing the reasons why the Japanese regime in the modern period was skeptical about Christianity. In fact, the Japanese did not prohibit it due to their disregard for human rights or religious freedom – these concepts did not exist at the time. It was a gradual process that paralleled the unification of the Japanese state. The first interdiction, promulgated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1587, was not meant to cut all contact with the West; rather, its main intent was to define a new relationship based on commerce and other “secular matters”. It is only when the next leader, Tokugawa Ieyasu, understood that this would be difficult to achieve with Spain and Portugal that contacts were restricted to the Dutch only⁴³. Three main reasons lead to this situation, from the Japanese point of view.

First of all, the figures who unified the country actively fought religious groups that held too much power inside Japan, and their resistance was not limited to Christianity⁴⁴. Another issue was the fact that Christians were not able to integrate themselves in the established religious framework, where many traditions coexisted relatively peacefully.⁴⁵ Having seen what had happened in the Philippines and in South America, the Japanese were also afraid that the missionaries would be followed by armies⁴⁶.

In fact, actual historical figures, such as the Jesuit Francisco Cabral, clearly held the view that conquest would be the best way to evangelize Japan⁴⁷. In the scenes with

⁴² See Michel Delon, “De la cruauté orientale”, in Hisayasu Nakagawa, and Jochen Schlobach (eds.), *L’image de l’autre vue d’Asie et d’Europe*, Paris-Genève, H. Champion Diff. Slatkine, 2007, p. 37–48.

⁴³ Ronald Toby had shown that international commerce intensified during the so-called Sakoku period, compared to its state during the missionary presence. Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991.

⁴⁴ For example, they resisted the social upheaval created by groups of people united through composite sets of beliefs based on several schools of Buddhism. Nobumi Iyanaga, *Rekishī to iu Rōgoku (Prison called History)*, Tōkyō, Seido-sha, 1988, p. 72–73.

⁴⁵ In fact, Christianity’s aggressive stance towards Buddhism was mostly a pretext for the authorities’ actions. Figures such as Oda Nobunaga or Toyotomi Hideyoshi were especially concerned with potentially competing centers of power and searched to destroy them whenever possible. This is evident in examples such as the fight against the Ikkō movement or by the burning of mount Hiei. Compared to the rulers of the Middle Ages, Japanese authorities were also clearly less affected by threats of divine reprisal uttered by the monks. The fact that, in order to become Christian, one had to thoroughly abandon his previous beliefs was also a problem for many. See Chisato Kanda, *Shūkyō de Yomu Sengokujidai (Religions in the time of Civil Wars in Japan)*, Tōkyō, Kōdansha, 2010.

⁴⁶ On such fears, see Kōichirō Takase, *Kirishitan no Seiki (The Century of the Kirishitans)*, Tōkyō, Iwanami shoten, 2013, p. 200-201.

⁴⁷ Endō’s vision of History is largely based on Takahashi Koichiro’s work. See Koichiro Takashi, “Kirishitan Senkyoshi No Gunji Kekaku (The Military Plans of Christian missionaries)”, in *Kirishitan*

Inoue – and also scenes with the interpreter played by Tadanobu Asano – where issues of discrimination within the Church are even mentioned, the movie succeeds in showing the complexity of the situation. While these scenes tend to exaggerate the depiction of Inoue as a pompous and unlikeable villain, it does not try to say who was right or wrong, but rather focuses on the perpetual struggle of understanding each other across different cultures.

Conclusion - “Kakure Kirishitan”, Faith and Conversion

In his later years, Endō lamented that the title of his book caused people to misunderstand him. The true focus of Endō’s message was on what happens to those who do not have the strength to become martyrs. *Silence* does not really mean the voice of God that Rodrigo was unable to hear – even though this is how it is presented in the movie. Rather, *Silence* refers to the silent voices of people with insufficient strength – common believers who are rarely mentioned in either Japanese or European sources. This meaning is conveyed in Rodrigo and Kichijirō’s dialogues⁴⁸.

In a way, Endō wanted to overcome a history of Christianity in Japan focused solely on the heroism of martyrs. No character of the book is completely right or wrong; rather, like several voices in his head, they represent his internal conflict⁴⁹. This does not mean that they necessarily reflect historically attested opinions – even in the case of historical figures – nor do they necessarily reflect Endō’s own views. In fact, Inoue’s voice in the book represents Japanese intellectuals in the 60s, while Ferreira embodies the Western, Catholic side.

In the film, Rodrigo and Garrpe are deeply moved when they see local Christians who kept their faith in secret, despite all the risk. While this was initially true when the Hidden Christians (*Kakure Kirishitan*) were rediscovered in the nineteenth century, in fact their unusual set of beliefs was quickly deemed as incorrect. They were thus encouraged to re-baptize and join the true faith.

While he was not actually a hidden Christian, Endō was very concerned with this topic and he did extensive research about it. It echoed his own resentment against a certain moral superiority claimed by the West, even inside Christianity. This had a deep impact on *Silence*. According to Endō, the fact that Christianity was not fit to grow in Japan, as said by Inoue, is not to be taken per se⁵⁰. Endō is criticizing the tendency to define the identity of Christianity as something fundamentally linked to the Western world. Such purity of faith would not admit adjustments to local cultures; it also leads to a negation of what actually did grow in the swamp : the faith of the local believers. As he says in his “Chinmoku no koe”, Endō clearly linked this to

Jidai No Kenkyu ed. Koichiro Takahashi, Tōkyō, Iwanami shoten, 1977), p. 75–171.

⁴⁸ This is mentioned in Endō Shūsaku, “Chinmoku no koe (The voices of Silence)”, in *Chinmoku no koe*, 13–101, Tōkyō, President, 1992, p. 29. This is the last, longest and the most precise account of the novel “Silence” by the author himself and one of the most frequently consulted documents by researchers who specialize in Endō’s work. He also addresses this issue more specifically in “Jakusha no sukui (Salvation for the Weak)”, in *Kirishitan no sato (Home for the Hidden Christians)*, Kyōto, Jinbun sho’in, 1971, p. 125–149. Also see *Ichimai no fumi-e kara (From One Fumie)*, in *idem*, p. 9–49.

⁴⁹ *Chinmoku no koe*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ See Endō Shūsaku and Van C. Gessel, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

the treatment of the Hidden Christians in his times⁵¹. This also explains his focus on the humble and the weak and not on the heroes who epitomized Catholic values. In the book, being unable to accomplish martyrdom does not mean a lack or an absence of faith nor does it suggest a lack of value.

In fact, the deepest layer of his book, and also in part of the film, can be seen as a negation of the idea of the universality of Church values beyond local contexts⁵². In that sense, Endō's message can be seen as very anti-colonial. His perspective was influenced by his own experience in France, in the 1950s, which made him question his own position, as a Japanese forcefully converted by his mother to Christianity⁵³.

Scorsese's vision does share many common traits with Endō's. His focus on the figure of the doubter, the Judas, here Kichijirō, and on the fate of the local Christians shows that he at least partly understood what Endō meant by the idea of "silent voices." He is also clearly critical of the act of martyrdom, which is described as extremely selfish and unproductive. In following the author's orientation, Scorsese's movie is at odds not only with the typical Hollywood trope of the hero saving the world but also with American culture's excessive focus on success and strength⁵⁴.

⁵¹ See *Chinmoku no koe*, p. 75–77.

⁵² While Endō does not say it clearly, and was probably more subtle, his wife, Junko, who worked as his secretary in his early career, interprets it that way. Junko Endō, "Otto to sugoshita hibi (Memories of the days I lived with my husband)," in Yasumasa Satō (ed.), *Endō Shūsaku wo yomu*, (Tōkyō, Kasama shoin, 2004), p. 25–43.

⁵³ See *Chinmoku no koe*, p. 97. Endō also wrote a novel (*Ryūgaku*, 1965) based on his life in France. On his forced conversion, see Endō Shūsaku, "Awanai yōfuku," *Shinchō* 64, no. 12 (1967): 202–203, where he compares his own Christian faith to Western clothes that do not suit the Japanese.

⁵⁴ This explains the audience's reaction to Kichijirō's character in the book, seen above.