A STUDY OF THE CATHOLIC PRIEST IN SHUSAKU ENDO’S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis was inspired by Professor William J. O’Brien’s Theological Issues in 20th and 21st Century Fiction class in 2008, and the Roman Catholic Church’s Year of the Priest which began in 2009 and ended in 2010. It was born out of a desire to study the character of the Catholic priest in literary works of fiction in order to learn new ways of understanding them and the God they serve in a rapidly changing world. Much has already been written about priests in the Western hemisphere in works such as Graham Greene’s The Power and the Glory and Georges Bernanos’ The Diary of a Country Priest but much less is known of books about priests from other parts of the globe. Through a process of elimination, it was decided to consult the works of the revered Shusaku Endo because he is considered by many scholars to be Japan’s, if not Asia’s, foremost Catholic writer. In an attempt to reconcile his Catholic faith with this Japanese identity, Endo ultimately produced a series of fictional stories that provided a rare glimpse into the lives of Catholic priests in a non traditional Catholic setting.

Four of Endo’s novels were chosen for this study because of the prominent roles that the Catholic priests played in them. Each book was read and analyzed in chronological order according to the year in which it was written. The intent was to follow the development of Endo’s analysis and portrayal of the priest throughout the years of his writing career. Consequently, a chapter of this volume was dedicated to each book’s priests and entitled according to their main functions in the plots.
The results of this study are as follows. *Volcano* introduced some of the differences between the local Japanese pastor and the foreign missionary priest which hinted at Japan’s long history of hostility and mistrust of the West and its religious beliefs. In *Silence* Endo took his reader back in time for a history lesson to get at the root of the problem and to see why Japan still treats Christianity like an unwanted foreign wife. In it he exposed the moral dilemmas facing the foreign priests whose acts of apostasy were never before seen as acts of love. Then came *The Samurai* to remind the reader that not all Western priests were to be blamed for the sour treatment of Christianity by the Japanese. Finally, *Deep River* unveiled Endo’s ultimate religious vision for his beloved Japan and the kind of priest that most closely resembled the companion and compassionate God that he and his countrymen long and hunger for.
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INTRODUCTION

Contrary to what some might think or deduce from his array of novels richly saturated with Christian themes, Shusaku Endo never considered himself to be a theologian, cleric or evangelist but a bona fide writer even though he could very well have carried all these titles to the grave because of his successful writing career. As Mark Williams pointed out in *Endo Shusaku: A Literature of Reconciliation*, Endo did not use his literature to proselytize about the Christian faith but rather to write about the struggles of ordinary people in Japan illumined by his own religious tradition. Endo himself said:

> If, for the sake of creating a truly “Catholic literature”, or for the purpose of preserving and propagating the Catholic doctrine, the personalities of the characters in the novel are subjected to artifice and distortion, then the work ceases to be literature in the true sense of the word. (Endo 1975, 20-21)

Furthermore:

> I don’t seek Christian material as the basis for my novels: it is just that my environment and themes are Christian; the environment in which I was raised had a distinctly Christian flavour to it, and so, inevitably, I became embroiled with Christian material and themes. I am certainly not writing in order to proselytize or to spread the gospel. . . . If I were, my works would definitely suffer as literature. (Endo 1979, 62)

Following in the same spirit as Endo, this thesis was not written in order to advance a specific religious agenda or to convert its readers to Catholicism. It is more a study of than a teaching about Endo. It was not born with a specific set of questions that needed to be answered. Rather, it grew out of a desire to explore and to be open to the mind and heart of this Japanese novelist outpoured in his texts.

> It is not a defense of Church dogma but rather, an acquisitive journey into the world of literature to seek new and different avenues to arrive at a deeper understanding
of one’s faith and to share acquired knowledge with others. The prevalent atmosphere at Georgetown University is one of inter-religious dialogue, and the freedom and sanctuary it provides its students to explore their own faith are truly blessings.

This thesis is a sincere and optimistic attempt to learn more about God inside the world of literature by studying the way Catholic priests are portrayed in works of fiction. Much has been written in the last century on the character of the priest in Western novels, while the nature of the priests in the literature of other parts of the world remains largely unexamined. For this reason, a study of Endo’s priests is ripe with opportunity and surrounded by the thrill of embarking on a pilgrimage to new and exotic places. The journey traverses more than 6,700 miles by air or a blink of imagination away to Japan, the “land of the rising sun.”

Shusaku Endo is considered by some (e.g., Jesse Kornbluth, William Johnston, and William McFadden) to be the Graham Greene of Japan because of the moral and theological issues he addresses in his novels. He is that nation’s foremost Catholic writer. His novels are filled with Christian imagery and plots that mirror his own struggle to reconcile his proud Japanese identity with his equally devout Christian faith.

Endo was born in Japan to a troubled marriage in 1923. After his parents divorced while they were living in Manchuria, he and his mother moved back to Japan to live with his aunt and they were introduced to the Catholic faith. Endo was baptized at the age of twelve and given the Christian name of Paul. Perhaps the name of that apostle to the Gentiles inspired a similar spirit of generosity in Endo’s own writing career.

To the disinterested observer, Catholic priests are an interesting breed. They represent an association composed exclusively of men that has greatly shaped and
influenced Western thought and life for centuries. They regard themselves as called or anointed to continue the work of Jesus in the world; and how Endo depicts them in his “non-Western” novels may provide new knowledge and insight into Catholic theology and experience. Endo does not push an agenda of what a priest should be like but rather scrutinizes and uses the unique experiences and conflicts of a priest to accomplish his literary rather than religious goals in a truly Japanese sense. Mark Williams’ sentiments come to the fore that Endo’s is authentic literature and his novels unveil a vast new territory within which to explore hidden theological treasures or insights.

Before one studies his priests, it is critical to know what kind of god Endo believes in. Surely Endo believes in the Catholic Christian God; but that concept is not sufficient. One must look deeper. Endo’s A Life of Jesus brilliantly portrays the kind of god he imagines the Japanese people, himself included, are more prone to embrace. Rather than picturing God as a strict, righteous and judgmental father, Endo envisions him as a loving and compassionate mother, one who forgives rather than condemns, someone who accompanies the poor and the downtrodden through the harsh realities of life. Written after his most famous novel, Silence, A Life of Jesus is a straightforward reflection of Endo’s faith. Whereas much of his life long work mirrored his real life experiences and beliefs, A Life of Jesus was more a personal essay of the life of a simple man who dared to love so greatly.

There is a haunting phrase in an old Samoan hymn that chants, “Le pogai e ola ai, na maliu Iesu. Ua iloa, iloa ai le alofa, le alofa, le alofa o lo tatou Matai.” It means, “The reason why we live is because Jesus died. This is how we know the love of our Chief.” The Samoan word for love, alofa, is repeated not once, not twice but three times in this song about the love of a chieftain for his tribe. The love of God is central to the Christian
faith. What kind of a king, leader, or person of authority would give up his own life for his people or servants? One can say that the entire story of Jesus can be easily explained in very short phrases for anyone, Christian or non-Christian, to understand. Who was Jesus? He was a Jew who was crucified. Why? Because He loved all. He sacrificed his life for all out of compassion and charity. This man chose to die the most gruesome death because of that special kind of love and as will be shown throughout the coming chapters, it will be the one most significant thing that Endo’s priests long for and lack in themselves.

It is of utmost importance to highlight God’s tender compassion to ordinary people because to Endo it is a necessary ingredient for any Japanese person to be able to sample and appreciate the Christian cuisine. Without it, they have and will continue to spit out the Christian message. As for Endo himself, he may not have been able to keep his ill-fitted Catholic suit on for too long if it was not for Christianity’s emphasis on God’s love and compassion for the afflicted. In other words, he eventually made his Western suit fit his Asian body and so this thesis will endeavor to find out how he accomplished that.
CHAPTER 1

*KAZAN (VOLCANO): NATIVE & FOREIGNER*

*Volcano* was written in 1959 and translated by a Jesuit priest, Richard A. Schuchert, in 1978. The events of the story take place during and after the second World War which is widely considered to be the beginning of modern Japan. It is not one of Endo’s well known novels but it made its way into this paper because of the priests involved in the story. They have much to reveal about Endo’s struggle to reconcile Christianity with Japanese sensibilities.

The title of the book signifies the major personification of the theme of the book, the ever ominous volcano, Akadake, which never makes up its mind if it is going to explode or not. Nonetheless, it holds hostage the fate of the inhabitants of Kyushu Island in Japan. She rises 6,000 feet above sea level and hovers like a giant evil sorceress over the people below. Her name means “Red Peak” though she could easily be called “Maleficent” since she answers to no one and cannot be persuaded to stop spewing her catastrophic vomit upon humankind. Philip Yancey refers to her as “[t]he volcano, a mountain of molten judgment that will pour down on people who deny the need for redemption, and becomes a symbol as omnipresent as the white whale in Moby Dick” (Yancey 1996, 3).

Father Durand is a former priest and missionary from France. He will be the first of several foreign priests in Endo’s novels to be discussed who had traveled to Japan with the very best of intentions, with fire in their guts and with religious fervor to spread the Gospel far and wide but who ultimately failed miserably in their attempts to the point of apostasy and even suicide. This happens too often to Endo’s priests because such failures belie the underlying message from Endo that their religion is so foreign and bitter to the
Japanese taste that it has never taken root in the “swamp” of Japan in the last four hundred years.

The French priest was previously pastor of a Japanese church in a town called Sakai-machi where he was considered to be aloof by many of his parishioners because he was quite studious, self-righteous and kept to himself most of the time. Durand’s former days of religious zeal are long gone as he now inhabits a small room in a shabby hospital in Kyushu. He is old and fragile, lonely and suffering from heart problems. The memories of his past keep haunting him and are the cause of great sorrow and discomfort for him in the present moment.

He was defrocked eight years earlier by the Church in Japan because of his involvement with a homeless woman he had given shelter to during an air attack on the city. Endo spares his reader the details of what actually transpired between the two of them but it is implied that it was scandalous. Here Endo presents a classic example of why many priests lose their vocation. Many men of the cloth have either been ousted or left the priesthood of their own accord over a controversial relationship with a member of the opposite sex.

Ironically, this woman is no longer in the picture as there is no further mention of her beyond the cause of Durand’s excommunication and harsh isolation from society; nobody wants to associate with him after what happened except for the seemingly benevolent Father Ginzo Sato who visits him several times a year out of a sense of moral and priestly duty. Father Sato’s behavior will be considered in more depth later in the chapter as he is also a window into the mind of Endo.

As Durand sits miserably in his hospital room, he ponders the events of his past that led up to his apostasy and finds blame in the nature of sin itself rooted in evil.
The only thing they were indignant about is that I gave shelter in the church to that utterly destitute woman. But a sin, if what happened really was a sin... It’s like a poisonous weed. When you dig it out, you find that the weed had ramifying roots reaching deep into the ground. When I was excommunicated eight years ago, I was still the man that I had been before, product of the roots I always had. (Endo 1978b, 56)

It appears that Durand is admitting his sinfulness and is very well aware that he is a sinner. This self-perception by the priest perhaps reveals the author’s own self-analysis of the effects of sin and evil in the world. Endo shows in the person of Durand that priests are sinners too and thus, no one is safe from the “volcano” in life.

According to William Sachs, “... Durand insists that moral evil does not grow old and die; it lies in wait then erupts. Like a volcano, evil assumes a seemingly human personality... In modern life, despite powerful means to deny the reality of evil, it proves irrepressible” (Sachs 1990, 32). Furthermore, in an interview with Herbert Mitgang, “Mr. Endo explained that there are dark elements within the human soul that gradually must emerge and explode like a volcano... [I]t is a symbol of evil and redemption” (Mitgang 1980, 51).

Perhaps the climactic incident that led to Durand’s apostasy occurs when he worked so hard and diligently to convert a young boy, Nobuo, and his family to Christianity, perhaps with an air of self-assurance; ultimately he failed because, when the boy died, his grandmother, even though she had received baptism into the Catholic Church, insisted that the boy be buried in the Buddhist way. According to her, he never liked Durand anyway. It was a huge blow to the priest’s ego after all he had done for the little boy and his family.

Saving souls, making converts – if priestly work had been for him the simple task it was for that Japanese priest named Sato, then perhaps he himself would have survived without being excommunicated from the Church. But in his own case, whatever he tried in wanting to do God’s
work had ended up ironically in disaster, in tragic consequences. Moreover, God was always silent. God did not answer his prayers. God was only trifling with Durand, as though he were nothing but a kind of gewgaw. (Endo 1978b, 69-70)

He went on to think that “[i]f sin were a thing to be so easily avoided, then perhaps he himself would have finished without becoming the decrepit old son of a bitch that he was.” At one point in the novel, he looks over at the distant volcano from his hospital room with resentment: “Go ahead and explode! Go ahead and explode! Durand was actually hoping that some day without warning the mountain would vomit its fire and smoke, retch with its lava, and destroy everything – as he had destroyed it all with his own life” (Endo 1978b, 70).

Critic Anthony Thwaite says, “Durand . . . sees Akadake as not only a symbol of evil, a representation of the apocalypse that will descend on the frail faith of the local Japanese Christians, but as a force that in actual truth will erupt, destroying both Aiba’s hotel and the retreat built by Father Sato” (Thwaite 1980, 15). Blake Morrison adds, “Durand relishes the prospect of an eruption. . . . He believes that Catholicism can never take root in Japan, and would greet an eruption as symbolic ‘proof’ that missionary work is futile” (Morrison 1978, 493).

Enter Father Sato! He is different from Durand in so many ways and yet, there is a twist to these two characters. Sato is a Japanese pastor of a vibrant and growing Japanese parish in the town of Kurata-cho. He is an old colleague of Durand who was his former superior. He is an outgoing pastor and confessor. Whereas Durand can be seen more as a representative of the institutional Church who embodies everything foreign about it to the Japanese, including his French nationality and language, Sato is more a people’s priest. Unlike Durand who has become ashamed of his priesthood and sees it as
a waste of time in Japan, Sato clearly embraces and flaunts his occupation. He enjoys the work and the respect that comes along with it. One will see later why Endo presents the two of them at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Critics say little about Father Sato because there is not much to criticize about him. Everyone likes him. He is like a Father Joe who is always present at a family’s baptisms, birthdays, weddings and funerals. Sato has been a priest for nearly thirty years. By all accounts, he has always been faithful to the Church, is a great confessor and pastor to his parish, and is down to earth. He also identifies with the particular joys and sufferings of his faithful because he is one of them. Perhaps it even helps his cause that he is of Japanese ancestry ministering to a Japanese flock. They look up to him and he seems to meet their expectations of what a Roman Catholic priest is and should strive to be: the face of God in their midst and a symbol of hope in their lives. After all, the last thing people would expect from their pastor is someone who would be an agent of doubt and despair.

Father Sato is hopeful that Akadake is not going to erupt again. He moves ahead with plans to build a retreat house called Saint Theresa’s Villa at the foot of the old mountain as a place of refuge and sanctuary for his parishioners. “For the clergy there were places like monasteries where several times a year a priest could withdraw for silent meditation on his union with God. Was it not, therefore, even more urgent to establish a holy place for the ordinary lay people living in their profane environment” (Endo 1978b, 36)? He does not doubt the existence of sin and evil in the world (the volcano) but by the same token, he does not give it a final say. This man feels that, as a priest, it is his duty to give people hope and refuge from the hardships of reality.
Furthermore, “the penance for sins that Father Sato imposed on the Christians was always lenient and easy to perform. To reveal one’s shameful sins is torturesome. In Father’s opinion this act of courageous will power was usually penance enough” (Endo 1978b, 38-39). He believed that the extreme self-torture that some people imposed on themselves for having committed a sin . . . did not necessarily lead to any mature development of faith or human personality” (Endo 1978b, 39). To some, it would appear that Sato is a great confessor who understands the struggles of the person asking God for forgiveness in the confessional.

However, when one takes a much closer look, this seemingly perfect facade of Father Sato starts to crumble. A young student came to him for confession because he had had sexual intercourse with his cousin, had committed the sin of fornication. After giving him his penance and absolution, nothing prepared Sato for what would come next inside the confessional. The young man did not leave after the confession was over. Instead, he challenged Father Sato’s prescribed penance by asking whether or not reciting a prayer ten times would really earn him forgiveness for what he did. The priest’s answer sounded like a rehearsed statement when he said, “Jesus Himself takes on the burden of your sins when He acts through me. You know that” (Endo 1978b, 39). Sato assumed that the student should understand this teaching of the Church.

“Father . . .” The student was pressing close to the screen, and his fetid breath blew directly into the face of the priest. “I never feel sorry for anything I do. Even when I had intercourse with my cousin, I didn’t have a bad conscience. I never felt dirty. Why not? If I was worried at all, it was only because somebody else might find out what we did. So even now I don’t feel sure. . . .”

. . . The ministry of a priest is much like the work of a physician involved with the painful maladies of his clients. Just as the physician will remonstrate with a patient excessively perturbed about his ailments, so Father Sato diagnosed the anxiety of the student as nothing more than the imbalance of youth. In reality Father Sato had no insight whatsoever into
the young man’s psychology, because he himself had never in his life experienced any doubt in his personal faith nor any frustration with the precepts of the Church. (Endo 1978b, 39-40)

What Endo did here was to uncover Father Sato’s shallowness as a confessor, that deep down inside he did not possess the heart of Christ or live up to his vocation despite the fact that he performed the duties of the job so well.

More evidence of Sato’s lack of compassion comes from his own lips in reference to Durand:

“If it weren’t for that fatal assignment to live with him at Sakai-machi, I wouldn’t be saddled with this bothersome duty, but . . . ,” Father Sato was grumbling to himself, when he was suddenly conscious of his own selfishness, and he felt ashamed. He had entertained an unkind thought, a lack of charity unworthy of a Christian. But never had he felt the least affection for Durand since the time they lived together. He had no appetite for his duty of going to the hospital several times a year. (Endo 1978b, 42)

The reader finds in Volcano a mountain with an ever present threat of danger and destruction to the Japanese people much like the negative manifestations of evil in the world: poverty, famine, disease and isolation that cause great sorrow and pain for ordinary souls. Father Durand came all the way from France with the Gospel of a man who was well known and worshipped for his charity, but the impression of Jesus that Durand gave the locals was quite the opposite.

Richard Schuchert writes:

For Endo, as demonstrated in his writings, the quintessence of Christianity lies in God’s loving compassion for His wretched children, His willingness to share with us our suffering. The Japanese heart and mind seek a merciful mother-image of God, rather than the stern, demanding, threatening father-image which (in Endo’s opinion) has been unduly emphasized by the missionaries, and which accounts in great part for the failure of Christianity to strike deep roots in the ‘swampland’ of Japanese culture and religion. Endo is attracted to Jesus the suffering companion of all men and women, more than to Jesus the wonder-worker; he is obsessed
with Jesus the human reject eventually crucified, rather than with Jesus the glorious pantocrator. (Endo 1978b, 8)

This father-image of God painted by the missionaries was even more apparent when Durand rebuked Nobuo’s mother in the story for not being hard enough on her child. He said, “Japanese mothers coddle their children. In my country we beat them with a whip until they are fifteen years old” (Endo 1978b, 64).

Ironically, the same man who abandoned his priesthood and is now bitter with the Church also desperately needed a gentle mother rather than a judgmental father. He was reduced to a sickly and vulnerable old man, the kind of profile that Jesus himself would have ached to be a loving companion to, but sadly, Durand took his own wretched life because he could not comprehend God as anything but the terrible image of an angry and disappointed father that he had projected unto others in his own life. He had morphed from a self-righteous figure to a self-condemned character.

“What a mount of heartache it is,” says Professor Koriyama. “A volcano resembles human life. In youth it gives reign to passions, and burns with fire. It spurts out lava. But when it grows old, it assumes the burden of past evil deeds, and it turns as quiet as a grave. . . .” (Endo 1978b, 30) It is evident in this quote from the story that Endo has ultimately equated the volcano with the life of Durand.

As for Sato, the ambitious “do-gooder” and charismatic priest, his overwhelming sense of duty and obligation suffocated the love and compassion that should have freely flowed from his heart. Even though he can be considered a model priest externally, internally his own lack of real compassion for Durand and the student is not in tune with the man he is supposed to emulate, Jesus Christ. His priesthood is shallow and he too is in need of a benevolent mother.
CHAPTER 2

CHINMOKU (SILENCE): HERO OR TRAITOR?

The previous chapter built a foundation for what is to come now. The characters of Durand and Sato provided a host of contrasting features between two Catholic priests in *Volcano*: a local and a foreign priest; a “good” and a “bad” priest; a strong and a weak priest; and a faithful and an apostate priest in an effort to grasp how Endo portrayed the priest in his literature. This chapter will delve deeper into the mind of Endo but it will challenge preconceived and prevalent notions of what is considered right versus wrong. Endo takes his readers for a bumpy ride in this one about the very difficult and bizarre history of Christianity in Japan.

In *Silence*, the moral or spiritual delineation between good and evil becomes blurry, psychological, and interpersonal because an important figure in the story, the protagonist Father Sebastian Rodrigues’ beloved Lord, chooses to remain silent in the midst of great suffering and pain not only witnessed but undertaken by the protagonist himself. God finally spoke to Rodrigues in the most beautiful, gentle and liberating voice giving him the divine authority to surrender to the enemy and to trample upon an icon of his image, the *fumie*, in order to reveal the truth about Him. God’s compassion for the suffering would be made manifest through His priest but only after subjecting him to a terrible test of faith that defied conventional theology. This thesis will discuss some of the issues raised and shed light on the spiritual journey and transformation of the main priest in what is now considered Endo’s greatest masterpiece.

Unlike *Volcano*, *Silence* is bloody, emotionally disturbing, and controversial. It introduces the loyal but troubled Father Rodrigues who never in his wildest dreams imagined that he would one day commit a terrible act that would shake his very core, for
he was a priest madly in love with God. In the eyes of the Church, he denounced his faith like another apostate priest before him, Father Christovao Ferreira.

Ironically, Rodrigues ended up crushing the image of his beloved Lord after a long and dangerous ordeal of trying to make amends for Ferreira’s errors. It simply did not make sense especially to the faithful. This makes him a very interesting priest to study and to find out why he too had apostatized. It is by understanding Father Rodrigues’ journey that the reader could glimpse what really happened to the historical Father Ferreira.

Rodrigues and Ferreira were members of the prestigious Society of Jesus which has been in existence for almost 500 years. Founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola in 1534, this vibrant order of priests became the face of Catholicism in Japan after Saint Francis Xavier introduced it to that country in 1549. The Jesuits were and still are known for their special place in the history of Catholicism and for their militant zeal in winning souls for Christ. In fact, the Formula or Charter of the Institute of the Society of Jesus states:

Whoever desires to serve as a soldier of God beneath the banner of the Cross in our Society, which we desire to be designated by the Name of Jesus, and to serve the Lord alone and the Church, his spouse, under the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth, should, after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience, keep what follows in mind. He is a member of a Society founded chiefly for this purpose: to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration whatsoever of the Word of God, and further by means of retreats, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. Moreover, he should show himself ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals, and indeed, to perform any other works of charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good. (“Society of Jesus,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia)
However, these soldiers of God were not alone in their zeal because missionary activity soon became crowded and noisy. It was during the heat of Western Europe’s imperialistic activities when the Catholics and Protestants arrived in Japan vying for their different versions of the Gospel. Christianity was a foreign religion that spread when the East knew very little about Western culture and vice versa; moreover, the god of the Christians appeared to be a white male who was wealthy, powerful and intrusive to the Japanese people, much like the colonial powers of Europe. It also seemed as if their god required sacrifice and self-denial from his followers, and he imposed ten main commandments that had to be obeyed or sinners would incur his wrath and punishment.

The mosaic of “Christ in Majesty” above the main altar of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., is a classic example of religious art depicting a righteous and judgmental God. The face of that Christ is not smiling but appears to be angry at the world. Christ sat on a heavenly throne while mere mortals were left on earth to suffer . . . for him. The Scriptures say:

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Mt 16: 24-25 [Revised Standard Version])

To someone who is not educated in Christian doctrine, this statement seems more like a command with conditions than an open invitation to receive God’s love and forgiveness. Christ was also not only invisible but silent, outside of man’s physical sense, and dwelled only in the minds and hearts of the faithful. He seemed distant and uncaring.

As this European god steadily acquired more and more native subjects, the Japanese leaders grew increasingly concerned and suspicious. This alien cult and its over zealous priests were growing in number and influence. They became a perceived threat
to Japanese unity and culture; and so in 1614, the Edict of Expulsion ushered in a period of unspeakable religious persecution in the lives of countless Christians in Japan.

One could easily conclude from this period in history that the Japanese were a stubborn, racist and reserved race whose violent attacks on the Christians were mostly unwarranted, but perhaps there is another side to the story. In fact, many of the Christian missionaries were hated by the Japanese for their perceived arrogance and lack of regard for Japanese culture and religion. Comments by Endo’s widow, Junko Endo, are very telling:

The dogmatic attitude of the missionaries who came to Japan in the sixteenth century has always been incomprehensible to me. Even if I take their limited knowledge of other religions into consideration, I cannot understand why they insisted that their God was the only and absolute God, and that other people’s beliefs were trivial or diabolical. Some of them demolished Shinto shrines that the Japanese had cherished from ancient times. Others set fire to Buddhist temples or stole valuable images of Buddha and used them as firewood. In my view such abominable behavior cannot be linked with Christ’s love. In this respect Christianity has been puzzling and alien to me. . . . (1999, 146-147)

Most would think that the Jesuits and the other evangelists were just doing their job in saving souls from paganism and “false doctrines” but perhaps, as Mrs. Endo wrote, they could have done it with a show of compassion and respect for the pagans and their way of life. Perhaps this lack of grace on the part of the missionaries could help to explain why the Japanese were distrustful of Christianity and ultimately outlawed it.

An interesting debate took place between Father Rodrigues and his version of Jesus’ Pilate, Inoue, the governor of Chikugo in Chapter Seven of Silence in which the Japanese governor compares Christianity to four concubines (Spain, Portugal, Holland and England) involved in a jealous rivalry among themselves for the affections of Japan.
He also likened it to the persistent and annoying love of an ugly woman and to a wife who could not bear children.

Despite the religious persecutions, no priest had apostatized since the beginning of the mission until 1632 when Japan’s foremost Christian missionary and theologian, Father Ferreira, renounced his Catholic faith after only six hours of torture. It could be said that others must have suffered the same or a much longer and unbearable ordeal but still had not given up their faith. Even worse, the Portuguese priest was now assisting the Japanese authorities in their brutal and deceitful attempts to wipe out Christianity from their nation. In his defense, Father Ferreira said to the captive Father Rodrigues, “This country is a more terrible swamp than you can imagine. Whenever you plant a sapling in this swamp the roots begin to rot; the leaves grow yellow and wither. And we have planted the sapling of Christianity in this swamp” (Endo 1980, 147). As one can imagine, this earthquake of a scandal sent shock waves across Catholic Europe and greatly undermined the missionary work of the Society of Jesus that took a century of blood and sweat to accomplish.

Also devastating was the impact of Father Ferreira’s actions on the faith of the flock in Japan. To be abandoned and betrayed by their shepherd is something that had never happened before and they had to come to grips with this new reality. An ugly wound had now been created in the flesh of the Body of Christ in Japan not by a layman but by a priest who was supposed to be a living image of Christ himself in the world.

A priest who denies his faith, his sacramental vocation and his God can be compared to a king forsaking his kingdom or a father neglecting his wife and children.

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1 Six hours according to William Johnston in his Preface to Silence; five hours according to Wikipedia; and three days according to Silence the novel.
To stress the gravity of the offense in the eyes of the Catholic Church, it is helpful to quote a few words from a sermon by Pope Pius XII on the unique role of the priest.

These words were mentioned in Pope John XXIII’s encyclical entitled *Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia* (From the Beginning of our Priesthood):

Through the character of Sacred Orders, God willed to ratify that eternal covenant of love, by which He loves His priests above all others; and they are obliged to repay God for this special love with holiness of life. . . . So a cleric should be considered as a man chosen and set apart from the midst of the people, and blessed in a very special way with heavenly gifts—a sharer in divine power, and, to put it briefly, another Christ. . . . He is no longer supposed to live for himself; nor can he devote himself to the interests of just his own relatives, or friends or native land. . . . He must be aflame with charity toward everyone. Not even his thoughts, his will, his feelings belong to him, for they are rather those of Jesus Christ who is his life. (John XXIII 1959)

Father Ferreira’s apostasy was not considered to be a loving act at all by the many souls who looked up to him to be a defender of the Catholic faith; and certainly it was difficult to convince the Church that his actions were inspired by God for there is no evidence that it put an end to the ongoing persecutions. In the midst of so much suffering and confusion, the Japanese Christians could only pray for a change in the hearts of the pagan officials who were perpetrating their oppression. Perhaps some even dared to pray for a deliverer, a hero who would lift them out of their present misery. Maybe God himself would intervene in this life but for the moment, He was silent. For the majority of Christians, they could only look forward to the next life as they were taught to believe because an end to the massacre was nowhere in sight. All the while, Christianity slowly began to wither away in the swamps of Japan.

From a study of *Silence*, it is safe to say that little did anyone know that God had a plan which would turn the tables upside down and baffle his own believers. Father Rodrigues back in Portugal must have been greatly hurt by the news that his own former
teacher and mentor had committed such an unforgivable deed. Even so, the superiors of the Society of Jesus were now gravely concerned about sending any more priests to die or fall from grace in that dangerous and schizophrenic\textsuperscript{2} country which had kept changing its attitude towards the Christians.

However, fueled in part by the need to find out why Father Ferreira apostatized, Father Rodrigues must have felt a new surge of conviction and bravado to sail into that pagan country and make things aright for the salvation of his former teacher and the Japanese Church and especially for the glory of God as dictated by his priestly conscience. The time was ripe for an even more aggressive campaign to fight sin and apostasy at any cost. It was the opportune moment to become a martyr for Christ because in the minds of many devout Catholics at the time, it was better to die a saintly death than to give up one’s faith, “the one true faith.”

Furthermore, Father Rodrigues believed that he was answering the call of the risen Christ: “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he that does not believe will be condemned” (Endo 1980, 22). Anchoring his enthusiasm and dedication was Father Rodrigues’ personal vision of the face of Christ, a face that was filled with vigor and strength that was impressed upon him from a picture he saw at seminary. He was fascinated by this face and he often thought about it throughout the trials and tribulations that he met on his spiritual journey.

\textit{Silence} earned its place in this thesis by entertaining doubt in the honest and sincere actions of its priestly characters. It stirred up more questions than answers and

\textsuperscript{2} Term borrowed from William Johnston in \textit{Silence} to describe Japan’s overall mood in the sixteenth century.
generated numerous reviews and comments from the research community many of which are listed in the Reference List of this paper. Was the apostasy of Father Rodrigues a true denial of his faith? William Cavanaugh writes, “. . . [T]he prose of Silence captures the most harrowing anguish with a stark restraint. Suffering, sacrifice, and God’s own silence lie at the heart of the novel. A deep moral ambiguity suffuses the story and opens a wound that endures long after the reader puts the book down” (Cavanaugh 1998). He goes even further by saying:

. . . I think Endo would argue that this wound is not one created by the writer, but belongs to the one who returned to his disciples after the Resurrection, asking his disciples to probe his unhealed wounds. It is this God who refuses to close the wound. He has chosen not to eliminate suffering, but to suffer with humanity. It is this Jesus who haunts Father Sebastian Rodrigues, the main character of Silence. (Cavanaugh 1998)

The wound described here will be crucial to understanding why Endo takes his readers on this journey in Silence.

The original title of this thesis chapter was “Hero AND Traitor” because it was intended to follow the same dynamic as the previous one, by comparing and contrasting the two main priestly characters of the novel, Father Rodrigues as the champion of the Catholic faith who traveled to Japan to preserve it and Father Ferreira who had previously sabotaged it by his outward act of betrayal. However, as the study progressed, it became more apparent that the focus should be on Father Rodrigues who ultimately bore the stigma of the ambiguity of being both hero and traitor depending on how Endo’s readers understand his moral dilemma and his solution for it by trampling on the very image of the One who created that “wound” in him.

So, the title of the chapter became “Hero OR Traitor?” Endo is stirring up such great anxiety and restlessness in his readers that they cannot ignore the range of emotion
and self-reflection *Silence* creates. He stuns his audience, solicits the disapproval of Mother Church, and infuriates many devoutly Catholic Japanese by justifying Father Sebastian’s “betrayal” if what he did was indeed a sin. Furthermore, he dared to invoke God himself as an actor in the novel because, according to Endo, it is God who puts the final stamp of approval on the turn of events in *Silence*. Father Rodrigues eerily hinted to it in the beginning of the novel:

> At last our departure is only five days away. We have absolutely no luggage to bring to Japan except our hearts. We are preoccupied with spiritual preparation only. Alas, I feel no inclination to write about Santa Marta [another priest who fell ill while on the journey to Japan]. God did not grant to our poor companion the joy of being restored to health. But everything that God does is for the best. No doubt God is secretly preparing the mission that some day will be his. (Endo 1980, 22)

So Rodrigues and his companion priest, Father Francisco Garrpe, make their way into Japan with the help of a dubious Japanese Christian by the name of Kichijiyo who, unknown to Rodrigues, had previously apostatized. Rodrigues’ fate would soon change for the worse when Garrpe died a martyr’s death trying to save Japanese Christians; and Kichijiyo turned him over to the authorities for a handsome reward like Jesus’ Judas did.

Being in a strange and unwelcome place, Father Rodrigues finds out that he is powerless to the wave of hostility sweeping across Japan. It is a country in the process of spitting out all traces of Christianity from their land. Even more unsettling for the priest is that the version of Christianity he grew up with was different in Japan. To him, a different flavor of it was emerging within the indigenous population; and he begins to question his own naïve and basic faith.

He breaks his rosary, dismantles its beads, and distributes them to his faithful followers. Father Rodrigues observes, “I suppose it is not a bad thing that the Japanese Christians should reverence such things; but somehow their whole attitude makes me
uneasy. I keep asking myself if there is not some error in their outlook” (Endo 1980, 45). Father Rodrigues begins to question his own religious experience, which does not seem to be lacking because of his European background but perhaps because of his lack of exposure to the world. Perhaps it was the beginning of an itch in him caused by a mysterious and silent mosquito.

Something else catches his eye after a cross examination by the authorities of three Japanese men suspected of being Christians.

And with this the order was given that they should spit on the crucifix and declare that the Blessed Virgin was a whore. Only afterwards did I hear that this was a plan thought out by Inoue, the man whom Valignano had spoken of as being the most dangerous of all. This Inoue, who had at one time received baptism to get advancement in the world, knew well that these poor peasants honored the Virgin above all. Indeed, I myself since coming to Tomogi have been a little worried seeing that the peasants sometimes seem to honor Mary rather than Christ. (Endo 1980, 56)

This one is a gift from Endo. Here he is hinting at a different version of the Christian God that has gained a following among the Japanese, a maternal essence found in the Virgin Mary rather than the fatherly and authoritative character of the traditional Christ.

At this point, the itch had developed into a rash of curiosity. William Sachs states as follows:

Rodrigues alone enters an Eden-like state on a wild island. Endo uses this setting for a rebirth as Rodrigues’ faith begins to waver. Bereft of Western culture and church, Rodrigues feels alone and senses that God is silent. Attuned to the god of Western culture, Rodrigues no longer can assume a false strength and a superficial faith. (Sachs 1990, 30)

Rodrigues continues to be amazed after witnessing the heartless beheading of a Christian named Chokichi.

Yet his perplexity did not come from the event that had happened so suddenly. What he could not understand was the stillness of the courtyard, the voice of the cicada, the whirling wings of the flies. A man had died. Yet the outside world went on as if nothing had happened.
Could anything be more crazy? Was this martyrdom? Why are you silent? Here this one-eyed man has died—and for you. You ought to know. Why does this stillness continue? This noon-day stillness. The sound of the flies—this crazy thing, this cruel business. And you avert your face as though indifferent. This . . . [T]his I cannot bear. (Endo 1980, 119)

The rash in Rodrigues’ psyche had now developed into an infection, a wound that he could not bear to ignore or endure. These incidents among others lead up to his moment of truth when his faith in God would be tested. The face of his beloved God, which is no longer of the radiant and resurrected Christ but of a man in pain and misery, is now presented before him. The only reason why he would even consider to trample it is to save the poor and wretched Japanese Christians because Ferreira and the officials told him that if he did that, they would stop the persecutions. Like a loving pastor to his sheep, he had heard the miserable cries and saw the cruel and unusual fate of his fellow Christians. He could not bring himself to shut his ears any longer nor could he crush the face of His Lord, the most beautiful thing in his life.

At this moment, the discussion of the novel turns to Endo’s widow for assistance in diagnosing Rodrigues’ state of mind.

The priest faces an agonizing dilemma. His mind oscillates wildly: he should save their lives even if it means that he would be declared an apostate and be eternally damned in hell; however, if he apostatizes, he will no longer be trusted as a priest and will damage the faith of his followers who believe in Paradise. Moreover, he will throw away the progress that many missionaries have made in Japan since the time of Xavier. He asks himself why he came all the way from Portugal to Japan; he came to propagate Christian belief, not to betray the Lord and to dash the hopes of Heaven. (J. Endo 1999, 146)

Such was the terrible moral crisis facing the good priest, and there seemed to be no cure for his spiritual and psychological ailment. It was more than a life and death situation, beyond what is right and wrong. His “Garden of Gethsemane” moment
concerned the fate of his immortal soul until Shusaku Endo unleashed his mystery guest, the one who created the debilitating wound in the first place, the Alpha and the Omega, the love of Rodrigues’ life, his Christ.

And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: “Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men’s pain that I carried my cross.” (Endo 1980, 171)

The statement from the *fumie* above is Endo’s bold assertion to the world. He makes a plunge here and dares to put words in God’s mouth as a fictional character in his novel, the only one who could undo the wound he had mysteriously created in Rodrigues. God is the only one who had the power to agree or disagree with the turn of events in Rodrigues’ history because He was the other person in the relationship. Mark Williams writes, “From a theological standpoint, there can be no justification for the Christ on the *fumie* to break his silence to the despairing Rodrigues. . . . From a literary perspective, this is the moment of catharsis, the moment in which the symbiotic relationship between light and darkness is brought into the starkest possible relief” (Williams 1999, 115). In other words, this divine intervention from God was necessary in order for the plot and chain of events to make sense.

In keeping with the spirit of Endo, it is important to note an observation by an American scholar who was mentioned by Junko Endo in her 1999 article.

The American scholar was referring to the Japanese word translated here as “trample.” He pointed out that in the English translation the verb is in the imperative mode, whereas in the original Japanese text the verb is in the permissive mode. One involves giving a command, whereas the other involves giving permission. The Christ in bronze talks to the priest as if he were such a mother who, sharing the anguish and pain for her child, says, “You may step on me now that I have perceived your suffering and weakness.” The difference between “Trample!” and “You may step on me” is so clear that there is no need to make a further comment. (J. Endo 1999, 145)
According to Philip Yancey, Endo places the central message of his novel in the transformation of the face of Jesus and not on the transformation of the characters.

“To me the most meaningful thing in the novel is the change in the hero’s image of Christ,” he says. Formerly, Rodrigues had believed in a Jesus of majesty and power. The image of Jesus that had appeared to him more than 100 times was pure, serene, heavenly. Gradually, though, as Rodrigues’ mission fails—and indeed, causes the death of many Japanese—the face of Jesus begins to change into one marked by human suffering. Weary, hunted, near despair, Rodrigues catches a glimpse of his own reflection in a pool of rainwater, a glimpse that becomes an epiphany: There reflected in the water was a tired, hollow face. I don’t know why, but at that moment I thought of the face of another man... the face of a crucified man... heavy with mud and with stubble; it was thin and dirty; it was the face of a haunted man, filled with uneasiness and exhaustion. (Yancey 1996)

Brett Dewey adds that, “Jesus appears before Rodrigues not as ideal beauty or cosmic perfector, but as a haggard face burdened with the travails of the world. Compassion for this face leads Rodrigues to stomp on the fumie. Endo reflects that the true vocation of the Church, then, is to be moved to compassion and to suffer with God and the peasantry of the world. To participate in God’s saving work requires nothing less” (Dewey 2004, 6).

Unlike Yancey, Hitoshi Sano finds the theme of the novel in the transformation of the priest himself:

After his apostasy Rodrigues is given a Japanese name and a Japanese wife; he dies at sixty-four years of age and is buried as a Buddhist in Muryoin Temple. As an apostate he is regarded by his Church as a miserable sufferer or traitor. But he is not so regarded by the narrator, whose closing words present Rodrigues administering the sacrament and declare that in so doing, “he was not betraying his Lord.” Rodrigues does not lose his faith in God; thus, he is not defeated in “the mudswamp” of Japan. The apostasy itself is part of a long trail that brings him to his strange final ministry. “Everything that had taken place until now had been necessary to bring him to this love” (298). Paradoxically, then, the apostasy becomes part of the deeper faith. As Kichijiro becomes a devoted follower of the priest after he betrays him and is pardoned for his sin, so
Rodrigues most closely embraces his Lord only after he denies him by trampling on the face of “that man” Jesus. (Sano 1999, 174)

Moreover, he finds a similarity between Rodrigues and Saint Peter, the first pope:

We should not overlook the fact that when the priest tramples on the bronze replica of Christ, dawn breaks and the cock crows far in the distance. The parallel with St. Peter’s denial of Christ is obvious. In Endo’s interpretation St. Peter understood the teachings of Jesus more deeply after his denial, and that deeper understanding was related not only to his sorrow for his betrayal but also to his confidence that he had been forgiven (What is God 85-88). The acute pain of the sense of sin and the belief in being forgiven are what the young missionary had to experience to be “the priest,” although unlike St. Peter he does not win any praise for what he does. (Sano 1999, 174)

In fact, with its slow pace measured in centuries, the Catholic Church seemed to come forth with its final say on the matter in 2008 with the beatification of Father Peter Kasui Kibe and 188 other martyrs of Japan. Like Father Rodrigues, Father Kibe was also subjected to Father Ferreira’s and Inoue’s cross examinations but he did not trample the fumie and did not urge others to deny their faith. He was martyred in 1639. Unfortunately for Endo, Kibe, in the eyes of the Church, was a true hero and not Rodrigues.

Nevertheless, Endo succeeded in painting an honest picture of the agony facing the Catholic priests who may have stepped on the fumie out of a genuine concern and compassion for the suffering Christians. More importantly, Endo revealed a different kind of God from the one the Europeans had previously introduced. This God cared more deeply for the suffering Christians than the reputation of the Church. It was as if Endo were saying that Japan needs priests who would sacrifice their own lives or religious allegiance for their fellow men first. The fact that Father Rodrigues saw and heard Christ speak to him from the fumie granting him permission to trample was a sign
of deeper faith. Others may disagree but it really arrives at the core of one’s relationship with his God.
CHAPTER 3

ZA (THE) SAMURAI: MISSIONARY & DIPLOMAT

In *Silence*, Endo chastised the Western priest. In *The Samurai*, he exalted him. Endo had focused exclusively on the Jesuits in the previous novel as they were the ones who first introduced Japan to the Christian God. In this book, he made it known that they were not the only Catholic missionaries around because in 1600, Pope Clement VIII opened up Japan to other religious orders. It meant that the exclusive face of Catholicism in that country had now shifted from the firm grip of the Portuguese Jesuits to the Spanish Dominicans and Franciscans and other priestly orders which were all Catholic, all male and predominantly European in make-up, style and approach. Despite the infighting and competition amongst these groups for the soul of Asian Japan, they were perceived as one powerful alien force by the anti-Christian natives who were determined to drive them out of their country once and for all.

During that time, the power and prominence of the West was expanding and with it, the social, political and cultural influence of the Roman Catholic Church which was an extremely well established, well funded, and well connected institution. Therefore, it is not a far stretch to say that it was considered to be more than just a religious community but also a very secular institution with a hierarchical structure that was second to none in its elaborate ranks and tenure beginning from the lowly priest all the way up to the throne of Peter. It goes without saying that it was an exciting time in history to be a priest, a missionary, or a diplomat to travel to distant lands in search of “glory, God and gold.”

However, Japan had its own clever way of governing and safeguarding its interests as evidenced in its feudal lord system which was moving aggressively towards a unified country that no matter how powerful and resourceful the global Catholic Church
was, it ultimately could not permeate the hard and unreceptive shell of the Japanese psyche. Furthermore, to protect itself from the annoying Europeans and their alien faith, Japan declared war on Christianity, and was poised to eradicate its teachings and adherents from its land even at the cost of isolating itself from the world at large.

Several scholars consider *The Samurai* to be a continuation or part two of *Silence*. The most obvious reason is that both stories were set during Japan’s troubled “Christian century.” Another reason, according to Philip Yancey, is that in both accounts “the clash of cultures works itself out in terms of tragedy, not comedy. Both novels reflect actual historical events and characters from the early 1600’s, when shoguns were tightening the noose around the Christian community in Japan” (Yancey 1996, 3). William Sachs likens the journey of Father Rodrigues from West to East to the journey of “the samurai,” Hasekura Rokuemon, from East to West. “Roku, like Rodrigues, feels cut off from his cultural assumptions. After perilous travels, he fails in his political goal, but undergoes a religious awakening” (Sachs 1990, 30).

This analysis by Sachs explains why Edwin Van Kley places the heart of the novel in Hasekura’s spiritual journey. He states:

> It affords Western Christians an exceedingly rare and sensitive glimpse of Christ and the Gospel as they appear to people as far removed from Western culture as the Japanese. Endo skillfully leads us to appreciate Hasekura’s complete indifference to Velasco’s strange beliefs, his disgust with the Japanese merchants who agreed to be baptized in Mexico City for the sake of commerce, and his revulsion at the images of that “loathsome emaciated man” on a cross who gazed down at him from the walls of countless bedchambers across Mexico and Europe. With Hasekura, we become increasingly angry with Velasco’s intrigues, which culminate in Hasekura’s baptism. We sympathize with him when, during the ceremony, he repeats as if in prayer, “This is all for the sake of our mission. It is only a formality. I don’t believe any of this.” We share his remorse at having betrayed his family, his ancestors, his feudal lord, and his homeland by becoming Christian. We are almost relieved when, upon
returning to his increasingly anti-Christian homeland, he quickly recants his belief in the alien religion. (Van Kley 1983, 20-21)

Of course, his story does not end there because it will become entangled with the lives of the other characters in the novel.

Unlike *Silence* which was told entirely from the perspective of Father Rodrigues, Hasekura’s personal account is often interrupted by excerpts from the diary of Father Vrais Luis Velasco who accompanied him and three other Japanese envoys to New Spain (Mexico) to establish trade relations between Japan and that Spanish territory in exchange for exclusive missionary privileges for the Spanish Franciscans in the realm of the shogun, Lord Tokugawa Ieyasu.

According to Mark Williams, *The Samurai* is a “multiconsciousness narration” composed of a combination of different character perspectives including Hasekura and Velasco and their respective companions, “ensuring as it does that Hasekura will never achieve the privileged status of the prototypical *shishosetsu* hero” (Williams 1999, 144). This existence of different narratives in the novel supports the cause of this thesis by allowing the main focal point of study to safely shift from “the samurai” himself to his colleague, “the Franciscan priest” Father Velasco, without betraying the title of the novel or its assumed protagonist.

Father Velasco was a proud member of the “Society of St. Paul,” the name given by Endo in the final Japanese text of *The Samurai* to describe the Franciscan Order which was opposed to the “Society of St. Peter,” the Jesuits, in the manner in which the Christianization of Japan should be carried out. While there is no official reason why Endo ascribed these two particular saints to these religious orders, it can be assumed that he was referring to the two main priests of *Silence* and *The Samurai*. Father Rodrigues, a
Jesuit, had denied Christ like Saint Peter did and Father Velasco, a Franciscan, possessed the supernatural missionary spirit of Saint Paul in proselytizing Gentiles or people in distant lands.

Furthermore, the Franciscans blamed the downfall of Catholicism in Japan on the Jesuits! Evidence of this fact is apparent in Father Velasco’s own words upon setting sail with his Japanese entourage to New Spain:

Ten years – it grieves me to say this, but the word of God has yet to bury roots in Japan. To my knowledge, the Japanese are blessed with an intelligence and curiosity that is in no way inferior to that of the various peoples of Europe. But when it comes to our God, they close their eyes and stuff their fingers into their ears. At times this country has even seemed to me to be an isolated, ill-fated island.

But I have not lost heart. I believe the seeds of God’s teachings have been planted in Japan, but the methods of nurturing them have been poor. The Jesuits gave no thought to the nature of the soil here, and they did not select the right fertilizers. I have learned from the mistakes of the Jesuits, and above all else I know the Japanese people. If I am appointed Bishop, I shall not repeat their mistakes. (Endo 1997, 58)

As was pointed out by Junko Endo in the last chapter, the arrogant and disrespectful attitude of the missionaries towards Japanese culture and religion was one of the reasons why their mission failed. Perhaps Endo is giving voice to this argument in the person of Father Velasco and putting his stamp of approval on Father Velasco’s style of appeasement instead of utter force in building trust and diplomatic relations with the Japanese in order to win them over to Christianity. He may have gone as far as to name the Franciscan order after himself in the novel. After all, Paul was Endo’s Christian name.

Velasco was bright and ambitious, and he embraced his calling to be an interpreter or liaison for the Japanese ambassadors to New Spain because he saw it as an
extension of his faithful duties as a priest and missionary:

Missionary work is like diplomacy. Indeed it resembles the conquest of a foreign land. In missionary work, as in diplomacy, one must have recourse to subterfuge and strategy, threatening at times, compromising at others – if such tactics serve to advance the spreading of God’s word, I do not regard them as despicable or loathsome. At times one has to close one’s eyes to certain things for the sake of sharing the gospel. (Endo 1997, 97)

By all accounts he was skilled at being a diplomat. The Franciscan priest used his charm and clever tactics to persuade the Japanese merchants to be baptized in Mexico City for the sake of advancing their commercial prospects with the private sector of New Spain. He again used his talents to convince three of the four samurai to travel with him to Spain and to become Christians in order to gain official approval of their trade proposal from the king of the Spanish empire himself because only he and not the Viceroy in New Spain had the power to do that. Little did they know of Velasco’s true intention of asking the Cardinal of Spain to make him Bishop so he could improve the state of the Christian mission in Japan.

Despite his worldly ambitions of being a missionary and diplomat, Father Velasco never lost sight of his true calling as a priest. In fact, there is only one moment in the entire novel that Endo revealed fear and weakness in the man. When he, Hasekura, Tanaka, and Nishi were passing through a Mexican estate on their way to Veracruz in order to set sail to Spain, they came upon a village that had just been scorched by an Indian uprising against the Spaniards.

“The natives have already passed through here,” Tanaka announced to the samurai and Nishi. Then he turned to Velasco, who was still clutching the reins of his horse and staring distractedly at the scene. “What’s the matter? Are you frightened, Lord Velasco?” he taunted. Velasco forced a smile. It was the first indication of weakness they had ever seen in the missionary. (Endo 1997, 129)
Endo does not explicitly say why Father Velasco was afraid but one can ascertain that it was because he was fearful of the idea that the Indians were rebelling against his kind, the Spanish. What soon happened was Endo’s testimony to the humble and special power of the priesthood.

In the banana groves not far from the estate, Velasco and his companions noticed a tattered Indian woman and her three children hiding in the shadows. She began to flee as Father Velasco compassionately cried out, “I’m a padre. . . I’m a padre. There’s no need to run” (Endo 1997, 130). His Christian heart must have felt sorry for the poor wretched woman and her offspring. At the same time, Velasco and the Japanese were spotted by a group of armed Spaniards at which point he raised his hand and said to them, “I am a priest.” Upon conversing with them, he turns back to the Japanese ambassadors and says, “There’s nothing to worry about. This is an encomendero and his servants who have come to escort us.”

The Indian woman started to cry out in a foreign language to the priest from behind the trees as the Spanish troops chided her for doing so. She was saying that the Spaniards shot her brother and that he was dying and needed the priest to administer last rites and offer prayers for his soul. Despite warnings from the encomendero,

FATHER VELASCO. “I am a priest,” Velasco answered softly. “If you’re a Christian you must understand. A priest has certain duties he must perform. Even if the recipient is an Indian. . . .”
THE ENCOMENDERO. “You can’t feel sorry for them. Padre, you just can’t trust these Indians.”
FATHER VELASCO. “I am a priest.” Velasco’s face and neck suddenly flushed crimson. This always happened when he tried to suppress anger or a violent emotion.
THE ENCOMENDERO. “Padre, stop!”
As if to shake himself free of the man’s words, Velasco started up the hill. When the Indian woman saw him, she left her children behind and ran barefoot after him, like a beast in pursuit of prey.
The envoys, not knowing what was happening, began to follow them.

FATHER VELASCO. “Please wait here,” Velasco shouted from halfway up the hill. “I’m not going now as an interpreter. I’m going in my calling as a Christian padre.” (Endo 1997, 131)

What had just transpired was Father Velasco standing in the unique and sometimes dangerous role of the Catholic priest who should not discriminate in offering pastoral care and love to all of God’s children regardless of their race, sex, language or state in life. Just when he was about to remain frozen with fear at the circumstances surrounding him and his companions in the smoking fields, Velasco effortlessly stepped into his role as a pastor without a moment’s hesitation and quickly recovered his strength and courage. He was not conflicted about who he was and the God he was imitating. One can say that his passion is similar to that of a good doctor during a medical emergency. He will lay aside all of his fears and prejudices and attend to those in need as he was properly trained to do.

It is also interesting to note that this passion in his vocation, no matter how difficult and laborious it was, did not dampen or hinder his self-control. There is no evidence in the novel to suggest that he gave in to the desires of the flesh. Every night before he slept, he would painstakingly bind up his hands in a knot to keep him from masturbating which was considered a sin especially in view of his consecrated state of life. One evening after having met with the Superior of the San Francisco Monastery in Mexico City, he returned to his room. “There I lit a candle and bound my wrists to avoid the temptations of the flesh” (Endo 1997, 97). He was conscientious about his vow of chastity, and everything he did, in his mind and heart, was for the advancement of the word of God. Velasco was a man on a mission. He did not want anything to stand in his
way, not even his natural sexual urges for he considered them to be a distraction; he must keep his eyes on the prize, his dream of becoming Bishop of Japan.

Perhaps his state of mind could best be summarized by his journal entry aboard the Santa Verónica before he and the three Japanese samurai arrived in Europe from New Spain.

Last night a heavy shower pelted our ship as it moved upstream. I awoke to the fierce drumming of the rain. Much to my shame, I had experienced a wet dream. I bound my wrists tightly precisely that I might not commit sin at times like this. This was how I had to fight through the night against the powerful lusts of my flesh, though they are not as violent now as in my youth. I knelt and prayed. How loathsome this physical body is. As I prayed, I was suddenly overcome by a terrifying sense of despair. Drop by drop I tasted the poison seeping through my soul, and I felt as though I had just discovered my own ugly face in a mirror. The lusts of my flesh, my hatred for the Jesuits, my almost arrogant confidence in my work in Japan, my thirst for conquest – one after another they surged up from the depths of my soul, to the point that I could no longer feel that the Lord would listen to my prayers and my petitions. I felt as if He were pointing a finger at me, showing me the abominable ugliness of the selfish ambition that lurked behind my prayers and my aspirations.

“No, it’s not true!” I protested frantically. “I have limitless love for Japan and the Japanese people. It’s because of that love that I want to arouse them from their lukewarm stupor. As a priest, I would have no regrets were I to devote my entire life to that purpose. All I do is for Thy sake.” (Endo 1997, 139-140)

In a subsequent conversation with Bishop Lerma in Seville, Spain, he considers his work to be a battle.

I believe that missionary work is like a battle. I’m fighting a battle with Japan. A missionary is like a warrior who must not be afraid of dying for the Lord. The Apostle Paul surely did not grudge spilling his own blood for the sake of the Gentiles. Missionary work is not the same as sitting cozily in the sunshine or in a monastery and talking of God’s love. (Endo 1997, 143)

Ironically, it is in these very words of the priest that there is found cause to dub him another “samurai” or warrior for Japan!
When in Madrid, the Japanese envoys learned that back home their shogun, Ieyasu, had joined his countrymen in the total annihilation of Christianity and the termination of trade with Spain. They quickly lost the support of the Spanish Church because of this news and with that their much coveted audience with the King of Spain. In one last frantic move, Father Velasco convinced them to accompany him to seek the Pope’s aid in Rome. After all, the Pope was like a king of all Europe. His words alone could alter human history.

Velasco had previously explained to the Japanese the magnitude of the Pontiff’s power and influence:

That person is the king of the Christians, who is known as the Pope. If we compare the situation to Japan, the Naifu might be like the King of España, and the Emperor in Kyoto might be like the Pope. But the Pope has infinitely greater power than your Emperor. Still, even the Pope is no more than a servant to one other person.” With a smile Velasco peered into the faces of the envoys. “I think you know without my saying it who that Person is. . . . You have seen His image in every part of Nueva España. And not only in Nueva España. Not only here in España. Every nation in Europe adores Him, and worships Him, and bows down before Him. (Endo 1997, 141)

One could almost envision what that smile on Velasco’s face was like. Perhaps it was like the warm and confident smile of a father proudly telling his children about their rich family heritage. After all, the religion that Father Velasco represented was a joy and pride for him and this chapter will soon show that Endo does not take it away from him like he did from Father Rodrigues in Silence. Endo will not let Father Velasco apostatize.

Unfortunately, the mission to Rome did not produce the desired results for Velasco, Hasekura, and the other samurai. Even the Pope himself could not stop the war that Japan had now waged against Christianity. Hasekura returned to his homeland with a sense of defeat and disappointment and was put to death by the authorities because of
his conversion to Christianity in Spain not realizing that he did it for the benefit of his shogun and country. Like Rodrigues, it was Hasekura’s own taste of apostasy. An even more devastating blow hit Velasco but he was given the opportunity to spend the rest of his days in peaceful meditation in Manila, safe from harm’s way with a chance to revitalize his priesthood.

Yet for the devout Franciscan, the battle was far from over. He was determined to fight until the end because he was a spiritual samurai! God had led him to the point of no return where he could not find excuses to abandon his conscience. He could not even control his yearning to go back to that awful country which did not love him in return. How can a man be so foolish enough to risk his life for a dying cause? Perhaps the answer lies in his own self-realization after the huge blow to his ego:

There are missions in this life which are accomplished only through death. The suicide of Tanaka Tarozaemon [one of the samurai] has taught me that. Yet in one regard the death of Tanaka and the death of the Lord are clearly different. The Japanese took his own life to atone for his inability to perform his mission as an envoy. But the Lord accepted death “to minister to many.” Lightning; and immediately after a clap of thunder heard in the distance. Lightning also flashes through my heart now. There are many people to whom I too must minister. A priest lives to serve others in this world, not for his own sake. I thought of the man at Ogatsu. It is to him that I must minister, and to other Japanese like him. “I am come to minister unto many,” I told myself as I stumbled along the road, “and to give them life.” (Endo 1997, 215)

Fast forward to the moment shortly before the real protagonist, Hasekura, faced his execution in Japan, he too finally found meaning in the disastrous voyage he took and in Father Velasco’s ministry. The following passage follows up well to Velasco’s previous quote and it contains some of the most widely cited phrases of the novel. Mathy, McFadden, Van Kley and Yancey have all mentioned it in their reviews as
thematic to the novel:

“I’ve always believed that I became a Christian as a mere formality. That feeling hasn’t changed at all. But since I’ve learned something about Government, sometimes I find myself thinking about that man. I think I understand why every house in those countries has a pathetic statue of that man. I suppose that somewhere in the hearts of men, there’s a yearning for someone who will be with you throughout your life, someone who will never betray you, never leave you – even if that someone is just a sick, mangy dog. That man became just such a miserable dog for the sake of mankind.” The samurai repeated the words to himself. “Yes. That man became a dog who remains beside us. That’s what that Japanese fellow at the Tecali swamp wrote. That when he was on the earth, he said to his disciples that he came into the world to minister unto men.” (Endo 1997, 245)

Moreover, “I crossed two great oceans and went all the way to España to meet a king. But I never met a king. All I ever saw was that man” (Endo 1997, 258). “As the samurai goes to his execution, he transfers his allegiance to a new master and dies as a believer in Christ” (McFadden 1996).

William McFadden in *Ethnicity, Nationality and Religious Experience* adds:

There is now a change in Endo’s evaluation of the passionate nature and the aggressivity of the European missionary. There is surely some kind of conversion wrought in the soul of Velasco. His pride and vanity do not survive the failure of his glorious plans for the trade mission, but he is still a foreign missionary, determined to conquer Japan in the name of the Lord, even at the cost of his life. Unlike Rodrigues in *Silence*, Velasco remains a European to the end and his cry from the surrounding flames, “I . . . have lived . . .!” is the emotional climax of the novel. (McFadden 1995)

Indeed Endo glorified Velasco’s death, in contrast to Rodrigues and Ferreira, who apostatized and carried on with their earthly lives assuming Japanese names and wives which stood against everything that Father Velasco and the Christian mission fought for. Father Velasco did not renounce his Christian faith, his Spanish identity and his vows to his bride, the Church. He willingly gave up his ashes to serve as fertilizer to help keep the Christian roots alive among the suffering and despair of the overgrown weeds of the
Japanese swamp. Furthermore, the priest’s actions spoke volumes from Endo that the Japanese ultimately craved for a compassionate ministry rather than a bullying mission.

At this time, it is necessary to stress that Endo did not betray the dignity of *Silence* with this reversal of the fate of his priest in *The Samurai*. The different outcomes for Father Rodrigues and Father Velasco may serve Endo’s goal of presenting a symphony of characters in his novels that corresponds to the universal need for love and compassion. Furthermore, McFadden seems to support this notion by quoting Van Gessel’s final words in his epic translation of Endo’s novel:

> The novel is in many ways just what its author hoped it would be – a symphonic piece that offers up many rich melodies, bringing together East [i.e., Hasekura] and West [i.e., Velasco], faith and unbelief, fervor and passivity. And though the players in this musical work come from dissimilar traditions and play upon completely different instruments, the concluding refrain sounds out clearly and, most importantly, harmoniously. (Endo 1997, 272)

> This harmonious blending of the strong and the weak, the active and the passive, self-assertion and self-denial represents the achievement of a goal Endo had set for himself many years before. . . . [H]e expressed the view that of all religions Catholicism had the best chance of presenting “the full symphony of humanity.” There must, then, be a part in that symphony which corresponds to the distinctive nature of Japan. (McFadden 1995)

Perhaps this is one of the most compelling reasons why *The Samurai* seems to find a more favorable place on Catholic bookshelves than *Silence*. As Nick Senger pointed out, “Endo, a Japanese Catholic, reminds us that “[T]he essence of Christianity is determined not by bureaucratic fiat, but by the private yearnings of each and every believer. . . . *The Samurai* is beautifully written, and an essential book for all Catholics to read, especially those engaged in active evangelization. Highly recommended” (Senger 2007).
Tadanori Yamashita adds:

Endo asks disturbing questions: Are not all missionary movements a kind of empire building, motivated by Westerners’ egoistic ambitions? Are not all Japanese Catholics essentially materialists and utilitarians, converted to Christianity simply because it is more expedient for their life span? Answering mostly Yes, Endo nevertheless affirms his unshakable faith in Jesus Christ as crucified Lord for all suffering and afflicted people. The book examines faiths of all kinds, shakes up Christian complacency, and searches the inner depth of Christian belief. (Yamashita 1983, 408)

Up to this point, nothing negative has been said about The Samurai. However, that is because no word has been mentioned until now about Velasco’s arch antagonist, Father Lope de Valente, who was the embodiment of everything wrong Velasco saw with the Jesuit run mission in Japan but even in Valente’s words of dismay and reproach can be found an element of truth about the final frontier, the Japanese psyche:

Their sensibilities are firmly grounded within the sphere of Nature and never take flight to a higher realm. Within the realm of Nature their sensibilities are remarkably delicate and subtle, but those sensibilities are unable to grasp anything on a higher plane. That is why the Japanese cannot conceive of our God, who dwells on a separate plane from man. (Endo 1997, 163)

Jessica Schneider picked up on that and offered the following reflection:

This argument, of course, could be made to distinguish the creative versus uncreative mind, or some might claim the idea of religious acceptance to be the easy way out (merely accepting the world was created in the way we are told, rather than dissecting what is already there in nature). But none of these points are addressed, and instead Endo argues the religious approach – believing that faith in God leads to higher things (Endo himself was Catholic), and this isn’t so much a criticism per se, but just something to consider. That despite the argument for a Christian God, there is no mention of the weaknesses that such beliefs can involve. Having said that, his arguments are those that few atheists and agnostics will agree with personally, yet Endo does manage to argue his side well, for what it is worth. But there are times when reading his religious points can become a bit tiresome. (J. Schneider n.d., under “Book Reviews: The Samurai, by Shusaku Endo”)
In the ensuing comments, Jessica Schneider will now create a bridge that will link 

*The Samurai* to the next chapter on *Deep River*. Her words, like a prophesy, have done 

this thesis a favor and kept the river of curiosity flowing into the next chapter: 

*The Samurai* is not the best of Endo I’ve read, for I’d recommend his 

novels *The Sea and Poison* and *Deep River* before this one, simply 

because those books delve a bit more deeply into other matters of the 

human psyche. His short stories are almost excellent, and his innovative 

structure and rich description is both memorable and impeccable. And 

while Endo does craft an interesting and complex tale in *The Samurai*, I 

cannot help but to think that his overt religious beliefs hindered him more 

in his fiction than helped. But every artist has his thing. So like a good 

Catholic, I have forgiven him. (J. Schneider n.d., under “Book Reviews: 

The Samurai, by Shusaku Endo”)
CHAPTER 4

FUKAI KAWA (DEEP RIVER): DISCIPLE & OUTCAST

*Deep River* is a modern tale that weaves together the lives of a widower, a volunteer nurse, an animal lover, a World War II veteran, and a priest. They almost have nothing in common except for their shared Japanese ethnicity and apparent need for “something more” out of life. The first four individuals converge on the same tour from Japan to India which brings them face to face with the Ganges, the sacred river of Hinduism. By dividing the novel into different chapters focusing on each person and his or her own unique dilemma, Endo seems to say that the different facets of Japanese society are all in need of renewal or redemption.

Isobe is burdened by the guilt of ignoring his loving wife when she was alive. His lack of emotional affection towards her seems to represent a typical trait among Japanese husbands. He travels to India with the hope of somehow reuniting with his dead wife. Mitsuko is unfulfilled with the excesses of sex, popular culture, and materialism afforded to Japanese women of her generation but does not believe that religion is a better alternative. She passes her time as a volunteer at a hospital and shuns religious people like Otsu who drive her to sarcasm. Her journey to India is another attempt at finding meaning in her life.

Numada is a lover of animals who enjoys incorporating them in children’s literature. His pet myna bird mysteriously died at the same time he survived his surgery for treatment of tuberculosis. He believes that the animal somehow perished in his place. So, he joins the tour group to pay homage to the myna bird by setting another one free in that land of exotic creatures. Kiguchi is haunted by the harsh memories of combat in World War II. He is on this tour of India to seek redemption for himself and his soldiers.
because they had eaten the flesh of their fallen comrades in order to survive the horrors of the battlefields.

   Each person ultimately finds himself or herself on a pilgrimage to the banks of the Ganges River, a river which represents the all embracing qualities of a God who accepts all of creation. The Japanese tourists learned that India is a place where life and death, good and evil, and nature and spirituality converge. Perhaps the one individual who stands out from the rest of the characters and helps Endo’s reader make a connection between Jesus and the Ganges River is Otsu, a Catholic priest who in spite of his pantheistic and universalistic tendencies still clings to the man on the cross.

   Endo’s life long crusade to wed the land of his birth to the religion of her European suitors had produced fictional priests whose significance stemmed mainly from their moral dilemmas and the battles they faced in preaching their God and religion in Japan. From native to foreigner in Volcano, to hero and traitor in Silence, and then to missionary and diplomat in The Samurai, all were united in their passion for spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ as illuminated by their Catholic faith and heritage.

   Then there sprang forth an unlikely candidate in Deep River to wrap up the study of Endo’s priests. Because of Endo’s ardent quest to unite his faith and his culture through his literature, one could have expected a he-priest or a powerful advocate of traditional Catholic doctrine to bring home to his native Japanese what Catholicism was truly about but that was not the case at all. Endo’s religious beliefs near the twilight of his life could unsettle some of his devout Catholic fans because he ultimately advocated a God who did not belong to any particular religion. The irony of his change in beliefs could be compared to how another man had greatly disappointed the suffering Jews
because he was not the political liberator they had hoped he would be some two thousand years earlier.

Endo did not culminate his procession of priests with a Catholic liberator or a bishop figure as he may have led some people to anticipate from his writings. Rather than creating a divisive figure to bring shame upon Buddhism and all the other “false” religions, he summoned a universal cleric who professed a God who was present in all religions and thus repudiated his own childhood faith. His name was Otsu, or judging by his very nature he can perhaps be called “Father Endo” because he was the ultimate priest in Endo’s literature who personified his beliefs near the end of his life.

In his final major piece of literature, Endo seemed to abandon the comforts of a Japanese setting and chose instead to unfold his plot in India where the Ganges River became a metaphor to make his argument that his fellow Japanese must dig into the deep waters of their existence to find renewal and rebirth that transcends all creeds and walks of life.

Interestingly, Endo did not choose the Jordan River, Jesus’ own baptismal font, in Israel nor the Tiber that flows through the epicenter of Christianity in Rome. Both locations would have been ideal for his Judeo-Christian training yet he chose a river that was outside of the norm and so religiously alien to the typical Christian and yet so thematically familiar to the average person. Mark Williams explains why the Ganges is so poignant to the theme of renewal and rebirth in the novel:

. . . [T]he desire for rebirth is incorporated . . . in the symbolic setting of the drama beside the Ganges. It is Mitsuko, towards the end of the novel, who points out to her fellow travelers that “the Hindus apparently call the Ganges the river of rebirth”. In the preceding narrative, however, much has already been made of the significance of the river in which the positive, life-giving force of water is inextricably linked with its negative, destructive force and which consequently serves to affirm both the
positive and negative experiences in the lives of those who assemble on its banks. Throughout, the emphasis is on the universal, unchanging qualities of the holy river and on the extent to which the memories and wishes that unite all mankind at the unconscious level are incorporated into its depths. Equally significant, especially to our reading of the text as a ‘novel of rebirth’, however, is the constant flow of the river: as it disgorges into the ocean, so the eternal cycle of departure and return is symbolically completed. In Endo’s novel, the cycle of unopposable history is given concrete form – in the manner in which the group of unrelated tourists comes together in a concerted search for renewal. (Williams 1999, 196)

Jessica Schneider adds that “[e]lements of reincarnation as it pertains to Hinduism, as well as the rebirth involved in Christianity are intertwined within the tale making Deep River both existential and spiritual, albeit not in the trite, New Agey way one would expect to find today. Each character’s scene is never mawkish, and the religion involved is there for merely layering, not for preaching” (J. Schneider n.d., under “Book Reviews: Deep River, by Shusaku Endo”). Certainly as she pointed out in the previous chapter, The Samurai was more overtly religious in tone than Deep River which grips more firmly the spiritual and psychological processes of rebirth or transformation that are familiar to every human being and every religion.

Spiritualism in this sense is not the same as religiosity because the former speaks of an awareness or appreciation for a higher power whereas the latter term expresses the allegiance of that spiritualism to a particular religion or institution. Each character in the novel was awakened to or caught sight of the spiritual realm after setting foot in India because they came from the very secularized society of Japan. Dan Schneider argues though that “the key element in the book is not spiritualism, but the psychic wholeness of the characters” (D. Schneider 2005). This dialogue about spirituality and psychology is an important development in Endo’s quest to transcend the boundaries of organized religion and its subsequent failure to appeal to the needs of all human beings.
Indeed in this story, it seems that Endo is trying to reconcile sensibilities to elements that are not only found in Christianity but can also be recognized in other religions, particularly those surrounding birth, love, death, and new life. In fact, Williams believes that religious syncretism is a constant and controversial factor in Endo’s fiction.

From the author’s earliest critical writing, the question has never been far beneath the surface, the relationship between the Christian monotheistic vision and a pantheistic world view a constant refrain. As already noted, however, the approach has not been entirely uncontroversial and Endo has been obliged to endure criticism, especially from the traditional Christian community, for his willingness to engage in such inter-faith dialogue. For Endo, however, the issue was not only intimately linked to the East-West divide he had been so consistently challenging, it was also a necessary corollary of the search for the self with which he was so absorbed.

In *Deep River*, this issue of religious syncretism is explicitly highlighted, both in the decision to locate the novel in India and in the nature of the tour on which the various characters come together: as the tour guide, Enami, explains at the pre-departure informational meeting, although the tour is nominally scheduled to take them to various Buddhist holy sites, it also provides the opportunity to visit a series of Hindu temples. (Williams 1999, 194-195)

It is as if Endo is saying that the Catholic Church, like Hinduism and Buddhism, is not so foreign or beyond comprehension to Japanese senses after all because different people, like the diverse Japanese tour group in the novel, can find answers to their problems in Catholicism too if people could focus more on the same universal qualities that sanctify the Ganges River. This idea is key not only to breaking the hard shell of the Japanese psyche but to making Catholicism more appealing to other non-religious societies as well. After all, there is a wave of secularism sweeping across Japan and the globe that Endo hints at in his book as a consequence of the modern industrialized age.

Van C. Gessel and other scholars claim that Endo finally reaches his ultimate religious vision in this novel set in India around the time of the assassination of Prime
Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. This vision could not be more explicitly expressed through anyone else in the novel than in the character of the Japanese Catholic priest, Otsu, who tenderly refers to God as his Onion. Despite the constant rebuttals from his female antagonist, Mitsuko, and the annoyance of his Catholic professors at seminary, Otsu consistently makes the case for his controversial beliefs. As he said so himself, “...[I]n the end, I’ve decided that my Onion doesn’t live only within European Christianity. He can be found in Hinduism and in Buddhism as well. This is no longer just an idea in my head, it’s a way of life I’ve chosen for myself” (Endo 1996, 184). Furthermore, “I was transformed by the conjurings of God” (Endo 1996, 63).

These lines created by Endo are very bold and powerful statements coming from an author who had spent most of his adult life trying to reconcile Japan to no other religion but Catholicism. Throughout the previously discussed novels, there was absolutely no evidence to suggest otherwise than that his priests were enthusiastically professing a faith that claimed exclusive rights to God and the salvation of the human race. To say now that all religions are equal because God exists in all of them is a new theological paradigm referred to in today’s vocabulary and religious discourse as religious pluralism. The more traditional and conservative groups within the Catholic Church consider this idea to be heretical because it would put Jesus Christ’s salvific sacrifice on the cross on equal footing with other saving forces such as Buddha’s nirvana and the Muslim Koran that exist outside the realm of Christian teaching.

To those who believe in religious pluralism and syncretism, it is becoming more acceptable to promote their ideas to mainstream Christianity these days. Ever since the Second Vatican Council, the concept of ecumenism is slowly opening the door to ideas and practices that were once considered to be inferior to Catholic dogma and utterly false
by the Roman Church officials whether they like it or not. And yet this new paradigm would definitely bring people of different faiths closer together and promote greater peace and harmony among them. As Otsu testified to his seductress and arch antagonist, Mitsuko:

We no longer live in the Middle Ages. We live in a time when we must hold dialogues with other religions. . . . A European scholar once remarked that the noble people of other faiths were actually Christians driving without a license, but you can hardly call this a dialogue among equals. I think the real dialogue takes place when you believe that God has many faces, and that he exists in all religions. (Endo 1996, 122)

On the contrary, Robert Jonas is doubtful about the future of Endo’s new approach to religion:

Endo’s vision of Christian discipleship – universalistic, non-judgmental, spontaneously merciful, color/class/religion blind, and willing to see grace moving in other faiths, may never be popular in Japan or in the West. It is a deep and demanding spirituality, calling us to dive beneath the taken-for-granted facades of our personal and religious identities. Endo’s implication, that all great world religions are entry-points into a loving, servant-like God that transcends them all, may never catch on, primarily because people everywhere like to believe that their particular religious dogma and practice is right and that others must be wrong. Perhaps it is true that some Christian church institutions deserve Endo’s admonishment. No one can deny that some of these institutions, like their secular counterparts, are driven by ego interests. The ego-It is always hungry for control and it will ultimately suppress all differences if left to its own devices. Ego-It is terrified of God’s real freedom, and will be merciful only when it is convenient. (Jonas 1995, 4)

Yet he still likens Endo’s priest, Otsu, to the challenging nature of Christ, “Otsu’s ‘heresy’ is also Jesus’ heresy – bringing ever-fresh hope, forgiveness, mercy and blessings to the outcasts, especially those of other classes and faiths” (Jonas 1995, 3).

No doubt there are plenty of core religious beliefs that will continue to perpetuate a caste system in the realm of religion which are not driven by selfish interests but by the diverse cultures and geographical backgrounds of people. Underneath the surface of his
new theology lies another layer of Endo’s “heresy.” For example, in *Deep River* his priest has also shockingly evolved into a man who has accepted the equal and collaborative existence of good and evil in the world. In defiance of his European Catholic brethren:

I’ve tired of the way people here think. The ways of thinking that they’ve kneaded with their own hands and fashioned to meet the workings of their hearts . . . [T]hey’re ponderous to an Asian like me. . . . I can’t make clear distinctions that these people make between good and evil. I think that evil lurks within good, and that good things can lie hidden within evil as well. That’s the very reason God can wield his magic. (Endo 1996, 65)

Such a different view of how God functions recalls statements of similar theological depth by a young rabbi from Nazareth who more than two hundred centuries ago, annoyed and upset the Pharisees when he proclaimed, “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30 [RSV]).

Even the tour guide in the story, Enami, supports a similar coexistence of beauty and ugliness in the world as apparent in the make up of India’s deities:

Many of the Indian goddesses take on not only gentle forms, but also frightening visages. I suppose that’s because they symbolize all the activities of life, both birth and, simultaneously, death. . . . Mary is a representation of the Mother, but the goddesses of India are at the same time symbols of the forces of nature that exult in death and blood. (Endo 1996, 138-139)

Patricia O’Connell summarizes Otsu’s dilemma quite well:

An outsider while a college student because of his religious fervor, Otsu ironically becomes another kind of outsider while studying for the priesthood because, for example, he cannot shed his Eastern belief in the commingling of good and evil; this notion is dangerously “Jansenistic or Manichaeistic,” he is told by more traditional Catholic teachers. He fulfills his priestly vocation in carrying the bodies of dead Hindu pilgrims, outcasts, to funeral pyres near the river Ganges for cremation. When asked how he reconciles the Hindu belief in reincarnation with Christianity, he explains, “Every one of the disciples had stayed alive by abandoning Jesus and running away. He continued to love them though they had betrayed him. As a result, he was etched into each of their guilty
hearts. He died, but he was restored to life in their hearts.” (O’Connell 1995)

Endo, however, does not seem to be naïve about his new and controversial beliefs. As evident through the role of Otsu in the story, it can be said that Endo believed God led him on this different path. The division of his book into five cases about five distinct persons with unique sets of problems suggests that Endo intentionally outlined his novel to help his readers understand where he was coming from. Isobe, Mitsuko, Numada, Kiguchi and Otsu came from distinct walks of life but they all shared the same human craving for rebirth or transcendence. In a land that is not their native country, they were awakened to the spiritual realm and realized that they had been asleep to it all their lives.

Dan Schneider criticizes the scope of the story and thinks that it was a mixture of broad and unorganized viewpoints.

Yet, the characters and their situations are too neat, too pat, and Endo seems content with them being more mouthpieces for viewpoints, than fully rounded characters. While not out and out stereotypes they are definitely archetypes. . . . Overall I’d marginally recommend the book, but do not expect a classic, more a book that you’ll be left wishing was fleshed out more. I don’t know how long it took Endo to write this book, but I get the sense that he may have rushed it, as he died soon after it was released in the mid-1990s. Had he focused more on just 1 or 2 of the tales, the whole novel may have found more focus. As it is, it’s sort of a philosophical hail of bullets. Unfortunately, in the non-material world, this does more damage to the gun than the target. (D. Schneider 2005)

Although Schneider may be missing the point or failed to make the connection between the characters and the Ganges River, Michael Lee seemed to get it:

While none of these characters experiences conversion to belief in reincarnation or the Incarnation, each has an epiphany, an insight into the literal meaning of Incarnation. While the direct experience of swarming humanity – high caste and low – finding its way to the teeming banks and polluted waters of Ganges, repels their fellow tourists, the true pilgrims know intuitively what their guide tells them, that “there is a difference in this country between things that are pretty and things that are holy.” All come to accept the great unfolding mystery of India: that nature and all of
life are expressed in a seemingly contradictory and certainly befuddling fusion of forces of creation and destruction, good and evil, life and death. In its silence the river emerges as the book’s most eloquent character as well as its central symbol: The river cared nothing about the corpses that would eventually be burned and scattered into itself or about the unmoving male mourners who appeared to cradle their heads in their arms. It was evident here that death was simply a part of nature. (Lee 1995)

“Nature had to be the medium that facilitated the interaction between man and the life force” (Endo 1996, 133).

Otsu makes clear once and for all his strange attraction towards the Ganges River in the following quote that speaks to the heart of the novel:

Every time I look at the Ganges River, I think of my Onion. The Ganges swallows up the ashes of every person as it flows along, rejecting neither the beggar woman who stretches out her fingerless hands nor the murdered prime minister, Gandhi. The river of love that is my Onion flows past, accepting all, rejecting neither the ugliest of men nor the filthiest. (Endo 1996, 185)

This description of his God is a profoundly different image from the one the Japanese people were introduced to by the Europeans centuries before. Otsu speaks of a God who will not abandon anyone but accepts all people in spite of their imperfections and free will. The river of God’s love and grace flows without interruption and gives new life to all human beings regardless of what they do. As Otsu said to Mitsuko years before he decided to become a priest, “Even if I try to abandon God . . . God won’t abandon me” (Endo 1996, 42). The use of this quote in the novel is a fundamental development in Endo’s efforts to create an awareness and an appreciation by the materialistic, rationalistic and un-religious Japanese people of his time for a world that includes God’s existence.

Near the end of the story, Otsu is badly beaten by a crowd of mourners at the Ganges River when he is mistaken for the Japanese tourist, Sanjo, who had aroused the
fury of the somber crowd when he disrespectfully snapped pictures of them with his camera. Sanjo managed to escape persecution when Otsu threw himself into the frenzy to save his life but Otsu was not so fortunate. The novel ends with Otsu’s condition turning for the worse.

Many scholars agree that Otsu is a contemporary and universalistic priest who repudiates established dogma and “operates at the margins of his religious institution” (Jonas 1995) while serving the needs of the poor and the outcast.

In some ways, Deep River hints at the author’s state of mind in the final decade of his life. The novel’s central character emerges as an unbalanced version of Endo’s familiar Christ figure: A physical wreck of a man, a Catholic who has failed in the seminary, but an individual who loves deeply, sacrificing his own life to save the life of another. Compared with the men in Endo’s earlier works, Deep River’s wretched, faded Christ figure seems flat and unconvincing. But perhaps he mirrored the author’s apparent difficulties with Catholicism. Possibly. Endo’s crusade – part literary, part theological, part personal – slowly drove a wedge between his life and his faith. (Desmond 1997)

Desmond seems to be talking about the fact that Endo ultimately did not fully embrace or adhere to traditional or European Catholicism. This tension or unresolved conflict can perhaps be best explained in terms of the ill-fitted suit Endo previously compared his Catholic faith to. He did not throw it away but at the end of his life, he appeared to have altered it because he found that many other Japanese or Asian people could not fit into it either according to the way it was presented to them.

This development or refashioning of his faith is the great irony or twist in Endo’s saga. He had come a long way from defending and differentiating the genuine faith of his youth and adulthood from the Western approach of coercion that had brought it to his homeland because he thought that the Europeans were too rigid, harsh, and arrogant in their ways of preaching the savior of all humankind.
Throughout his long career, it seemed as if he was very careful not to infringe
upon the sacred tenets of the Catholic religion as he was trying to reconcile it as it was to
his Japanese identity. Blame the messenger and not the message because early on in his
literary discourse, this is what he had to say about his religion at its very core devoid of
Western or non-Western garb:

It seems to me that Catholicism is not a solo, but a symphony. It fits, of
course, man’s sinless side, but unless a religion can find a place for man’s
sinful side in the ensemble, it is a false religion. If I have trust in
Catholicism, it is because I find in it much more possibility than in any
other religion for presenting the full symphony of humanity. The other
religions have almost no fullness; they have but solo parts. Only
Catholicism can present the full symphony. And unless there is in that
symphony a part that corresponds to Japan’s mudswamp, it cannot be a
true religion. What exactly this part is – that is what I want to find out.
(Williams 1999, 32)

Endo has dug deeper to the point where he has now broken this sacred trust of
Catholicism and dared to undermine it by declaring that his God does not belong to the
Christians alone. It can be said that he has successfully divorced Jesus from the Church
which He founded because he so desperately wanted more than anything to make Christ
relevant not only to the Japanese but to all peoples who hunger for unconditional love
and everlasting happiness that the Catholic Church should not dare copyright as things
only she can provide. Otsu speaks as follows:

Love, I think, is the core of the world we live in, and through our long
history that is all the Onion has imparted to us. The thing we are most
lacking in our modern world is love; love is the thing no one believes in
any more; love is what everyone mockingly laughs at – and that is why
someone like me wants to follow my Onion with dumb sincerity. My trust
is in the life of the Onion, who endured genuine torment for the sake of
love, who exhibited love on our behalf. As time passes, I feel that trust
strengthening within me. I haven’t been able to adapt myself to the
thinking and the theology of Europe, but when I suffer all alone, I can feel
the smiling presence of my Onion, who knows all my trials. And just as
he told the travelers on the road to Emmaus when he walked beside them,
he has said to me, “Come, follow me.” (Endo 1996, 119)
These words are typical of a true disciple.

In his own personal understanding and search for God, he has ultimately drifted away not only from traditional Catholicism but from the polarizing institution of religion altogether:

Gone is the simple contrast between “monotheism”, with its “absolute division between God, angels and man”, and the “pantheistic” world of the East in which “everything represents an amalgam and extension of the individual”. In its stead lies a more sophisticated approach, one indebted in equal measure to the Buddhist preoccupation with “knowing the self” and to the Christian focus on redemption. For Endo, the development was integral to the narrative design for Deep River and, in a discussion with William Johnston, translator of Silence and authority on Christian-Buddhist dialogue, he acknowledged his fascination with “the search, not for Christianity, not for Buddhism, but for a ‘third religion’ . . . one that was divorced from institutionalized religion such as Christianity, or Buddhism, or Islam”. Here was the call for “a religion that transcends sectarianism . . . a great life force” whose relationship with Christianity Endo was committed to clarifying. (Williams 1999, 195)

This kind of disillusionment with established religion by deep and honest thinkers like Endo makes heretics and church founders out of men like Martin Luther and Joseph Smith. They dared to analyze and challenge the status quo; and when a great number of people believe what they say, a cult can arise as a result. Though Endo never claimed to be a theologian, his sensational career as a writer has awakened in his readers, especially the Japanese, a curiosity if not an unsettling of the mind that has provoked them to look into his personal faith and see why he held such views.

Perhaps if he had lived for another ten years, his ideas would have developed even further to be so outside Catholic control that he would have been excommunicated like Martin Luther was and then his staunch followers would have formally organized into an ecclesiastical community that would soon be molded into another Protestant sect or even an entirely new religion like Mormonism. If not, then the “big tent” which is a
trait of modern Catholicism could possibly continue not only to tolerate but offer him space to share and discuss his beliefs. To the credit of Catholicism, J.T. Oldfield said, “He has rejected the Catholicism of his youth, but not the equality and charity that lies in the heart of its teachings” (Oldfield 2009).

However, there is no evidence to suggest that Endo officially parted ways with the Catholic Church before his death in 1996 nor will his life long crusade for transcendence be forgotten. His Japanese Catholic brethren may also find no reason to fear these latest developments in his religious views because there is an unmistakable resonance from Deep River to suggest that the “third religion” that Endo faithfully sought after was ultimately Jesus Christ himself, the deep river, the man with many faces. Endo could throw the Catholic Church under a bus if Jesus told him to for his allegiance was first and foremost to Christ.

In conclusion, the priest of Deep River distinguishes himself from Endo’s past clerics in his universal and thus still very “catholic” call for discipleship at the expense of his institution’s tight grip on Christ and His message. Perhaps Endo realized a teachable moment near the end of his life and did not let it pass by without a message for all people and not just his own fellow Japanese: that the God he loved with all his heart, mind and soul had many faces that would endear Him to all people of all denominations, religious and secular alike.

He recognized the necessity of the moment to cast his net far and wide to catch as many people as he could before he lay his pen down for the last time. People do not need to look very far for examples of Christ’s many faces. As a priest by the name of Father Michael Weston said in one of his homilies, “The many faces of Christ can be
summarized in the Beatitudes” (Weston 2011) for his own words reflected his many wonderful attributes:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5: 3-12 [RSV])
CHAPTER 5
A HEAVY BURDEN, A LABOR OF LOVE

The purpose of this final chapter is to summarize the lessons learned about the characters of the Catholic priest in each of Endo’s chosen novels and what they told about God and the religious sensibilities of Endo and his fellow Japanese. This section also brings to light new knowledge that arose since the initial analyses of the previous chapters. In the end, it is the hope that this discussion has helped in some ways to lighten the load that Endo assumed when he was baptized into the Catholic Church and carried with him for so long, that of reconciling his faith and his cultural identity. It was not only Endo’s burden. It was, is and should be a labor of love for all believers especially those at the frontlines of representing God to a diverse and rapidly changing world, namely in this study, the priests of the Catholic Church.

*Volcano* poignantly inaugurated the study of Endo’s priests in a variety of ways. Chief among these ways was that it enabled Endo to expose the reality of the tumultuous relationship between Japan and the Christian faith. It helped to explain why after more than four hundred years of missionary activity, still less than three percent of the present population consider themselves to be followers of Jesus Christ and even less than that statistic adhere to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Endo brought forth from the volcanic soils of Kyushu Island two different kinds of priests to represent the two opposite sides of the Japanese Christian story. Father Durand was the face of the European Catholic Church while Father Sato personified the local branch. Despite desperate attempts by both native and foreign clergy throughout the years, the Catholics are outnumbered a hundred times by non-Catholic groups.
including Buddhists and Shintoists. Because of the help of Endo’s literature, the non-Japanese world could now understand why.

Durand was a foreign priest among many who traveled to Japan to convert its “heathen” inhabitants to the “one true faith.” He was well educated, proper, and somewhat anti-social similar to the glorious and grand aspects of his alien faith. Since a priest tended to be the mirror of God and religion in the eyes of the people, it was difficult for the Japanese faithful to separate him and his actions from the Catholic institution or its Catholic god. Durand’s place in the story reflected an alien deity who was separate and apart from humankind, a god who was stern, aloof and insensitive to the circumstances facing every day people; and the Japanese did not like that.

In all fairness to Durand and his kind, he was there to save souls and to share the Good News about the God he loved and worshipped. He may not have realized that his personal behavior and actions were seen as anything but helpful and salvific to the people of Japan. He also did not seem to understand them and their culture. Furthermore, representing a world wide religion like the Catholic Church must have gotten to the egos of the missionaries in such a way that they simply took it for granted that anyone and everyone would see the same light they saw in Christianity. As the analysis of Endo’s fiction showed, Japan proved to be a very rigid people when it came to religion in general.

Nonetheless, Father Durand did not take his vocation lightly in the beginning, but despite his qualifications and devotion to his work, he failed at it miserably. As previously mentioned in Chapter One of this thesis, two main incidents in the story transformed him from a proud priest to a disgruntled ex-priest. The first instance was after he had spent a great deal of time and effort in helping to discipline Dr. Tsugawa’s
unruly son, Nobuo. He was also expecting that the little boy’s Buddhist family would convert to Catholicism in the process. However, his recipe for success clashed with the Japanese way of raising their children.

Upon receiving complaints from the principal at Nobuo’s school for Nobuo’s lack of discipline, poor grades and dishonest behavior, Father Durand insisted that it would be better for the little boy to live in the dormitory on campus rather than with his grandmother. To Father Durand’s shock and irritation, Dr. Tsugawa asked the little boy for his opinion on the matter which prompted Durand to rebuke the Japanese mother for pampering rather than disciplining the child.

To tell the truth, Durand simply didn’t like this whey-faced Nobuo with the dismal glint in his eye. He didn’t like the boy, and yet again it was not from any malicious intent that he separated the boy from his mother, even though they had been living peaceably together since the father died. As a matter of fact, Durand was a rather busy man, but he spent all the leisure he could find in caring for the needs of this family. For example, on Sundays when Dr. Tsugawa was away from home with her duties at the hospital, Durand took thought for the loneliness of Nobuo, who was away from the dormitory for the weekend. There was even one occasion when he brought the boy to the church to spend the day. Durand had no experience in handling children of his own, and to make matters worse, this child was a Japanese. He didn’t know how to entertain a child. He took the boy into his own room and sat down with him to read aloud from a Life of Christ done in an easy-to-read translation. But Nobuo, who happened to be wearing a dirty bandage on his neck, just sat there with empty eyes gazing out of the window to infinity. (Endo 1978b, 64)

Sadly, Nobuo’s health deteriorated while he was away at school and he eventually died. To Durand’s grave disappointment the boy’s grandmother, despite being a baptized Catholic, insisted on giving Durand’s convert a Buddhist burial, and she said that there was nothing that Durand could do about it because the boy never liked him anyway. So the priest walked away feeling resented and humiliated. No matter what he did for that boy and his family, it was not enough to convince them to abandon their pagan beliefs.
He did not know that his stern style of discipline and arrogant approach rather than he himself were considered to be despicable by the Japanese because he ended up hating himself for what had transpired. Such was the difficult and failed relationship between Christianity and Japan much like the relationship between Father Durand and Nobuo.

After that ordeal, Durand provided sanctuary to a helpless woman inside the church during an air raid on the city. This incident sealed Durand’s fate as a priest because it was perceived as a scandalous affair by the church officials. So he was excommunicated and stripped of his vocation and identity as a priest, which did nothing to help him recover from the earlier blow he took and it only made the Japanese loathe him more. He sank deeper into despair and began to lose hope in the Japanese people. It seemed again and again that he was being punished for trying to help them, for trying to love them. Yet despite his prayers and supplications, God was silent.

Alas he felt that Japan was incapable of accepting his Christian faith. He gave up on the Japanese and spent the rest of his life lamenting his failures and losses. Durand resigned to the notion that evil and sin were inevitable despite his or anyone’s best efforts. His final act of suicide was similar to that of a lover whose affections were denied by his beloved or a man overwhelmed by the weight of his burden. The fate of Durand was the fate of European Catholicism in Japan because according to Endo, the Japanese preferred the more soothing approach of a warm-hearted mother to the harsh and judgmental temper of an authoritative father.

Father Sato, on the other hand, represented a more positive and optimistic outlook of Catholicism and the priesthood from within the local community. Since he was a son of Japan, he more closely resembled and exuded the native faith of the people than the foreigner, Durand, did. Sato was a leader and hero to his Japanese congregation. He was
popular among the young and old alike. He understood their language and culture and was cognizant of their particular needs and concerns. His parish was growing and flourishing and his homilies were uplifting to the people. However, even the loyalty and dedication of Father Sato to his Church and vocation could not shield him from the mysterious cloud of doubt that hovered over the Japanese. Even he and priests of his kind were not exempt from Endo’s criticism.

It was as if Endo created Father Sato’s character as a warning to those who performed public acts of charity in order to receive praise rather than out of genuine concern and care for the poor and the suffering. Sato’s problem was obvious in his relationship with Durand. He had visited the frail old priest in the hospital out of a sense of duty rather than a true sense of compassion; and Durand knew of Sato’s insincerity.

If Durand could sense Sato’s superficial intentions, even more so could the Japanese detect the same with their keen sense of emotion. There must be something deep inside the Japanese psyche that shuts down if it feels threatened or under appreciated because despite Father Sato’s stellar performance as a Catholic priest, even he could not break the hard shell of the Japanese mind or soul.

His failure to do that was quite evident in the student who came to him for confession. The fact that the young boy was not sorry for his sin of fornication was symptomatic of the Japanese view of sin as well as how frail their faith in Christianity was too. As Endo said in the novel, Father Sato had no insight into the young man’s psychology because Father Sato had never questioned his own faith before and he believed everything the Church had taught him. This apparent inability of Father Sato to fathom the depth of the student’s moral dilemma reflects the parallel inability of both native and foreign Christianity to take root in the “swamp” of Japan.
The following words by a former Communist turned Christian makes the theory above even more convincing:

Japanese Christianity has had no language with which it could speak directly to the Japanese laborers and masses. In other words, Christianity in Japan has been the property of a few intelligent people. It may not be a mistake to say that Japanese Christianity has been unwilling to get rid of such a stigma. Moreover, since the end of World War II Communism has succeeded in winning some of the hearts of the university students and of the intelligentsia, and so the principal basis for Japanese Christianity has partly been destroyed. It may be said that Christianity floats unattached on the surface of present day Japanese society. The fact that a number of Newly Arisen Sects (or Shinko Shukyo) are getting to the hearts of the masses may be disquieting for those Japanese Christians who deplore the decrease in the number of their believers. (Shiina 1959, 18-19)

In many ways, Japan was well represented in the novel. For example, she was the little boy, Nobuo, who was caught in the middle between his mother’s coddling and Father Durand’s strict style of discipline. He looked at Durand with empty eyes and hated him for not treating him better. Japan was also that woman whom Durand saved during an air attack on the city who cost him his priesthood because of an apparent affair with her. Thirdly, Japan was the student who went to Father Sato for confession but left feeling more unfulfilled because the priest could not understand his psychology. Finally, Japan was even Father Sato himself whose own faith seemed weak because of his lack of real compassion for Durand, the former priest and outcast.

Though it was previously mentioned that Endo equated the volcano, Akadake, to the life of Durand, it could also be compared to the stubborn nature of Japan towards Christianity and the fact that nothing could stop her from vomiting lava or spitting out the Christian message at will. Therefore, it seemed advisable for the Church and its priests to try and win her trust and to treat her with tender love and care. The harsh tactics of a father do not work to sway her interest but the gentle and engaging touch of a mother can
calm her fears and open her heart to the Christian message. Endo made this point clear in his *A Life of Jesus*:

The religious mentality of the Japanese is, just as it was at the time when the people accepted Buddhism, responsive to one who ‘suffers with us’ and who ‘allows for our weakness’, but their mentality has little tolerance for any kind of transcendent being who judges humans harshly, then punishes them. In brief, the Japanese tend to seek in their gods and buddhas a warm-hearted mother rather than a stern father. With this fact always in mind, I tried not so much to depict God in the father-image that tends to characterize Christianity, but rather to depict the kind-hearted maternal aspect of God revealed to us in the personality of Jesus. (Endo 1978a, 1)

Through the prism of *Volcano* Endo appeared to have posed a challenge for Christianity to find ways to appease the fierce temper of Japan, the volcano, because Christianity could not force her to submit to its foreign teachings without respecting her in the process. Japan wanted to be loved and to be understood by a kind and compassionate God and she expected nothing less from Christianity or its priests. Like the volcano, she will stop at nothing, continue to heat up, and recycle her hostility towards Christianity from generation to generation if Christianity does not seek to learn and appreciate her unique culture and temperament.

Endo’s personal crusade to resolve the conflict between his faith and his ethnicity, as *Volcano* had previously alluded to, was played out on a much larger scale. It was actually a real feud between two great entities, Japan and the Catholic Church. It posed a heavy burden on Endo to find ways to resolve this tension between his two great loves but it was also a daunting task for the Catholic priests because they were the official and ordained missionaries and messengers of the Christian God.
Today Christianity is still an alien religion to Japan and as it turns out, Japan is also still foreign to Christianity. The well noted Japanese American theologian, Joseph Kitagawa, seems to support the theory that Christianity is as stubborn as the Japanese:

In sharp contrast to Confucianism and Buddhism . . . Christianity has tended to reject not only all the rival religious systems but also the values and meanings of the cultural and historical experience of the Japanese. . . . Christianity tends to make Japanese Christians uprooted – but not necessarily liberated – from their social, cultural, and spiritual traditions and surroundings. (Endo 1978a, 4)

One could deduce from Kitagawa’s analysis that Christianity was a rigid and non-accommodating entity by the Japanese people. After all, Catholicism does profess the fullness of salvation and an extreme view held by many Catholics is that there is no salvation outside the Church. On top of that, many Catholics cannot see Catholicism without its Western garb. So, any non-Western beliefs and practices could easily collide with its proud European exterior.

By the same token, it is also possible to say that the Japanese people treated the Christian faith like an ugly, foreign and barren wife who could not bear children and they regarded missionary activity as the forcing of her love upon Japan. This was evident in the probing of Father Rodrigues in Silence by the Japanese magistrate, Inoue, Lord of Chikugo. The Church and Japan were not compatible largely due to their opposing views on sin, redemption, and the very nature of God. More importantly, as Endo must have thought, he had to confront not only the philosophical but also the historical questions of his religion. This theory is probably behind his reasons for writing Silence which is a brilliant dramatization of the early decades of Japan’s and Christianity’s unstable courtship.
As previously mentioned, Father Rodrigues is the main character of *Silence*. He, like his mentor, Father Ferreira, was a member of the Society of Jesus co-founded by Saint Francis Xavier who brought Christianity to Japan in 1549. Endo used Rodrigues’ personal predicament to hone in on the very difficult challenges facing many of the Catholic priests in the first one hundred years of Christianity in Japan. It was a very sad and tragic time in Japanese history. This novel revealed that Japan and Christianity shared an ugly past.

The Catholic Church was seen as an instrument of European power and control, a threat to Japan’s political and economic security, culture and way of life. So, Japan maximized her attacks on this foreign religion as a catalyst for national unity and as a protective measure from the searing tide of Western influence. In the eyes of the shogunate, Christianity was Europe’s clever way of trying to conquer Japan.

Of course the Catholics knew that this fear and hostility on the part of the Japanese government towards them was unfounded. Despite their fate, they remained steadfast in their faith and as a result many of them, including their priests, were martyred brutally. The final death blow to the Christian mission came when Japan’s foremost Catholic theologian, Father Christovao Ferreira, apostatized and joined the Japanese authorities in the quest to destroy the Christian faith. His actions astounded the Catholic Church, scandalized the faithful, offended his colleagues and overturned less than one hundred years of fragile missionary activity.

Father Rodrigues traveled to Japan with the gusto of a hero and a soldier for Christ. His love and adoration for a triumphant and resurrected Christ in majesty energized him and encouraged him to save the faith of Ferreira and his Catholic brethren.
He was not afraid of anything because he felt that he was doing the will of an almighty and powerful God and that the road to Paradise was simple and secure.

However, the Japan he encountered was not like any other pagan country he had read about in his textbooks at seminary. This one was as mysterious as the vastness of the Pacific Ocean that spread out before him. He was not prepared for the doubt and uncertainty that Japan had in store for him. He did not know that his childlike faith in a heroic God, his fairy tale fantasies of martyrdom, his basic understanding of human suffering, and his narrow view of Catholicism would all be shattered into a million pieces by the fate that awaited him in Japan. He would be forced to choose between his God and his developing sense of compassion towards his fellow human beings.

Such a burden on Rodrigues’ conscience was compounded by the fact that God was silent in the midst of his suffering and theirs. These were Rodrigues’ words upon witnessing the martyrdoms of the Japanese Christians, Ichizo and Mokichi, by the “water punishment” which involved tying them on crosses at the edge of the sea so that the tides could slowly climb up above their heads and drown them:

They were martyred. But what a martyrdom! I had long read about martyrdom in the lives of the saints---how the souls of the martyrs had gone home to Heaven, how they had been filled with glory in Paradise, how the angels had blown trumpets. This was the splendid martyrdom I had often seen in my dreams. But the martyrdom of the Japanese Christians I now describe to you was no such glorious thing. What a miserable and painful business it was! The rain falls unceasingly on the sea. And the sea which killed them surges on uncannily---in silence. . . .

What do I want to say? I myself do not quite understand. Only that today, when for the glory of God Mokichi and Ichizo moaned, suffered and died, I cannot bear the monotonous sound of the dark sea gnawing at the shore. Behind the depressing silence of the sea, the silence of God. . . . the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent. (Endo 1980, 60-61)
Later on in captivity, Rodrigues cried out to God in a low voice upon catching sight of a former Japanese Christian town that had been burned to the ground by the authorities:

Why have you abandoned us so completely? . . . Even the village was constructed for you; and have you abandoned it in its ashes? Even when the people are cast out of their homes have you not given them courage? Have you just remained silent like the darkness that surrounds me? Why? At least tell me why. We are not strong men like Job who was afflicted with leprosy as a trial. There is a limit to our endurance. Give us no more suffering. (Endo 1980, 96)

Rodrigues’ words showed that he was genuinely moved and hurt by the sorrow and pain all around him. He felt sorry for the Japanese Christians and was awakened to the ugly reality of the business of suffering. He had never been exposed to it before in his predominantly Catholic homeland of Portugal. Thus his faith had never been tested before in this way especially since his heroic and victorious Christ was disappointing him with His apparent silence and absence of divine intervention.

What was also disturbing to Rodrigues was that he discovered that the Catholicism he was brought up with was taking on a different form among the local Kakure Christians who appeared to worship Mary rather than Jesus. Yet, this fact only proved the Japanese preference for a maternal and gentle God. Their longings for a compassionate God would only grow deeper and made more manifest by Endo in Silence.

As a leader and father of the Church, Rodrigues felt compassion towards his Catholic brethren which made his decision to trample on the fumie that much harder for him even though many other priests and believers had to face the same dilemma and the majority of them did not apostatize. If Rodrigues trampled, he would save so many lives but he would betray his beloved Lord in the process; and if he did not trample, he would
only perpetuate the suffering of the Japanese Christians. He had prayed so much to his God to end the suffering but God did not seem to care.

At that very moment, Father Rodrigues stood right in the middle of the war between Japan and the Christian faith. Both sides presented him with rewards if he chose either of them. Martyrdom was the prescribed method of salvation by the Church if he did not abandon his faith; while guaranteed freedom for him and his fellow Christians was the reward for apostasy offered by the Japanese officials. Hanging over Rodrigues’ head was the fact that his original idea of martyrdom turned out to be quite different from the one he had witnessed others so miserably take in Japan. He did not previously know that the outcome would be so dull and depressing. Life went on. The world did not end. God did not send down a heavenly host of angels to escort the martyrs to the sky. God remained silent and that was enough to create doubt in Rodrigues’ mind. In fact that was enough to convince Ferreira to apostatize. Ferreira states:

“. . . Listening to those groans all night I was no longer able to give praise to the Lord. I did not apostatize because I was suspended in the pit. For three days, I who stand before you was hung in a pit of foul excrement, but I did not say a single word that might betray my God.” Ferreira raised a voice that was like a growl as he shouted: “The reason I apostatized . . . are you ready? Listen! I was put in here and heard the voices of those people for whom God did nothing. God did not do a single thing. I prayed with all my strength; but God did nothing.” (Endo 1980, 167-168)

The difference between Ferreira’s and Rodrigues’ apostasies is the fact that Rodrigues heard the ugly fumie speak to him giving him permission to trample.

Here is Christ, the companion (dohansha) figure so prominent in the author’s work, a being who, resolved not to look down in judgment, chooses rather to share in the individual’s pain and anguish as his “companion.” (Williams 1999, 122)

It may not have been Rodrigues’ beautiful and radiant Christ of Easter but it was the weary and suffering God of Good Friday who made Himself manifest to Rodrigues in a
different way. It was a very human Christ that he encountered in Japan, a Christ who lived and suffered among his people, a God who shared their sorrow and pain, a companion and suffering God.

 Nonetheless both Ferreira and Rodrigues were condemned by the Church for what they did and were not counted among the heroes and saints of their time even though Endo gave them some justice in his literature. Nobody knows for sure if these two priests denied their faith to save their companions but regardless of what their true intentions were, the people whose lives they saved may have thanked their companion God for them.

*The Samurai* is like a sister novel to *Silence* because both are historical fiction stories that depict the time of the mass persecutions of Christians in Japan. Unlike Fathers Ferreira and Rodrigues in *Silence* however, the main priest in *The Samurai*, Father Velasco, accepted a martyr’s death at the end of his drama. He saw martyrdom as another way of sowing the seeds of faith in Japan. He also had a different view of God. Unlike Father Rodrigues, Father Velasco’s foremost image of God was the emaciated and wretched figure dangling on a cross, the image the missionaries wore around their necks or suspended from their waists.

 More importantly, he had a solution for the silence of God. Even during the most trying times of his mission like the moment that he and his Japanese envoys learned of Japan’s decision to totally annihilate Christianity while they were seeking to establish trade relations with the King in Spain, his following words spoke to the deep connection he had with the human Jesus:

> Yet during His lifetime even the Lord Jesus experienced the despair I am now tasting. When on the cross He cried, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?’ Jesus must have been
unable to discern the will of God, as I am unable to discern it now. But just before He gave up the ghost, Jesus conquered that despair. And He offered up to God the childlike words of trust, ‘Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.’ That much I know. And I would like to become such a person. (Endo 1997, 188)

However, Velasco was not naïve about what was going on in Japan. He felt like he knew a great deal about the Japanese and how to persuade them to become Christians because he took his work as a priest and missionary very seriously with a twist of diplomacy which he thought was lacking in the tactics of the Jesuits. Father Velasco equated his mission to a battle and that he was a warrior who must not be afraid to die and spill his blood for the Lord . . . and Japan. So finally, here was a communicator, a liaison, a clever priest and statesman who could salvage what was left of the fragile relationship between Japan and Christianity which is why he dared to take up an audience with the Pope as a last resort. Unfortunately, even the leader of the powerful Catholic Church could not stop Japan from carrying out her war on Christianity which effectively outlawed it until after World War II.

The Franciscan priest blamed the dogmatic and arrogant approaches of many of the Jesuit missionaries for the downfall of Christianity in Japan. Velasco believed in a more engaging, diplomatic and persuasive approach to religion rather than the coercive, demanding and domineering strategies employed by many of the other Catholic missionaries such as the Jesuits. He states:

When I look at the Japanese, I sometimes wonder whether a true religion – one that seeks after eternity and the salvation of the soul as we understand them – can develop in that country. There is too great a gap between their form of godliness and that which we Christians know as faith. And so I must fight fire with fire. If the Japanese are going to seek worldly benefit from religion, then it is essential for me to discover how to channel their carnal ambitions towards God’s teachings. For a time the Jesuits managed it skillfully. They showed the feudal rulers new weapons like firearms and all manner of strange articles from the South Seas, and in exchange for
those items they got permission to preach the gospel. But, after that, they did too many things to invoke the wrath of the Japanese. They tore down the temples and shrines where the Japanese worshipped and, taking advantage of the weakness of the feudal lords absorbed in the internecine warfare, they created little colonial settlements to protect their own special privileges. (Endo 1997, 69-70)

The error of the Jesuits was that they took Japan to be the same as any other country. But Japan is not like any of the other nations which our ancestors conquered. Japan has been protected by a great ocean, the Pacific, and though its people have been ignorant of Christianity, they have been able to maintain enviable order and equip themselves with a powerful army. Unlike the slothful races, the Japanese are clever and cunning and filled with pride, and whenever they or their nation have been insulted, they have swarmed together like bees and retaliated. In a country like that, we must adopt methods of proselytizing suitable to that country. We must not insult them. We must not incense them. Yet the actions of the Society of Jesus have done precisely that. (Endo 1997, 158)

Of all the foreign priests in this study, Father Velasco was the only one who was clearly in love with Japan and he believed that it was his duty as a priest of the Catholic faith to save her soul for eternity. In this regard, The Samurai could also be referred to as a story of Father Velasco’s great love or infatuation with Japan. On board the San Juan Baptista, Father Velaso early on contemplated his desire to return to Japan after the mission to present day Mexico was over:

Tonight, after finishing my prayers on deck, I asked myself once again, Why do I want to return to Japan? Why am I so attracted to that land? It was almost as if I was gazing into the unfathomable mind of a stranger. It is not that the Japanese are more fervently religious or more capable of grasping the truth than the other peoples of Asia. Indeed, while the Japanese do in fact possess superior mental faculties and curiosity, surely there can be no people in the world who have consistently rejected things which do not bring them worldly benefits? Though they pretend for a time to give a listening ear to the teachings of our Lord, they do so only because they want to increase their fighting power and their wealth, not because they desire the word of God. How often I have tasted of despair in that country! The Japanese touch for acquiring worldly wealth is almost too sensitively attuned, but they have not the slightest feeling for things eternal. Yet somehow Japan and the Japanese intensify my yearning to preach the word. I feel it my mission to return to Japan because I want, just as one tames an obdurate beast, to subdue each of the adversities which rears its head there. Through my veins courses the
blood of my grandfather, who helped to conquer the West Indies and thereby found favour with King Don Carlos. I am also descended from Vasco Balboa, a great-uncle on my mother’s side who became Viceroy of the Panamas. My ancestors, the pride of my family, governed those islands with ships and swords, but I want to try to subdue Japan with the word of God. (Endo 1997, 85-86)

This novel also shared some of the concerns that many of the interested and sincere Japanese people had about converting to Christianity but this issue could not be more pronounced than in the dilemma facing “the samurai” himself, Hasekura Rokuemon. From his dull life of duty and service to his family and community in the marshland, he obeyed his feudal lord by joining Father Velasco and the other Japanese envoys on this long and dangerous trade mission to Europe, but he did not expect to be persuaded by Father Velasco to become a baptized Christian to ensure the success of the journey. He had to return home successful because his lord promised the restoration of certain pieces of land to his family if he did.

Many of his Japanese countrymen converted for the sake of commercial interests but he saw it as more than a simple act of formality or a petty means to a desirable end. To him, it was like an apostasy against his family to accept Christianity.

To become a Christian was to betray the marshland. The marshland was not made up merely of those who lived there now. The ancestors and relatives of all the living silently kept watch over the marshland. So long as the Hasekura house continued, the samurai’s deceased father and grandfather would be a part of the marshland. Those dead souls would not permit him to become a Christian. (Endo 1997, 160)

The worship of ancestors and the respect and admiration owed to them is a deep aspect of Japanese culture. It is a practice that the Christians consider to be pagan and idol worship while the Japanese consider it to be a fabric of life. Even Saint Francis Xavier made note of it and what he said was eye opening and perhaps one of the core
philosophical reasons why it was and still is very difficult for Japanese society as a whole to fully embrace Christianity.

Through a letter to the Society of Jesus in Europe in 1552, Saint Francis Xavier revealed the difficult and painful dilemma that Christian teaching created for the Japanese people who loved their ancestors but were interested in converting to Christianity.

In the course of two months, after numerous conferences, we baptized about five hundred persons at Yamaguchi, and every day, by the mercy of God, others are added to the number. The converts are very zealous in exposing to us tricks and frauds of the bonzes and sects of Japan; they show so diligently great affection and respect towards us that we have great confidence that they are true and solid Christians.

Before their baptism the converts of Yamaguchi were greatly troubled and pained by a hateful and annoying scruple—that God did not appear to them merciful and good, because He had never made Himself known to the Japanese before our arrival, especially if it were true that those who had not worshipped God as we preached were doomed to suffer everlasting punishment in hell. It seemed to them that He had forgotten and as it were neglected the salvation of all their ancestors, in permitting them to be deprived of the knowledge of saving truths, and thus to rush headlong on eternal death. It was this painful thought which, more than anything else, kept them back from the religion of the true God.

One of the things that most of all pains and torments these Japanese is, that we teach them that the prison of hell is irrevocably shut, so that there is no egress therefrom. For they grieve over the fate of their departed children, of their parents and relatives, and they often show their grief by their tears. So they ask us if there is any hope, any way to free them by prayer from that eternal misery, and I am obliged to answer that there is absolutely none. Their grief at this affects and torments them wonderfully; they almost pine away with sorrow. But there is this good thing about their trouble—it makes one hope that they will all be the more laborious for their own salvation, lest they like their forefathers, should be condemned to everlasting punishment. They often ask if God cannot take their fathers out of hell, and why their punishment must never have an end. We gave them a satisfactory answer, but they did not cease to grieve over the misfortune of their relatives; and I can hardly restrain my tears sometimes at seeing men so dear to my heart suffer such intense pain about a thing which is already done with and can never be undone. (Xavier 1552)

Saint Francis Xavier’s letter only reinforced the great doubt plaguing the Japanese in the Christian God, a god who threw unbelievers in Hell and kept them there for
eternity with no hope of escaping His judgment. This was not the picture of a loving and compassionate God but a vengeful God whose punishments were severe and final. To be told that their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and children were damned for eternity because they did not know and worship the one true God was a difficult pill to swallow for the Japanese.

Perhaps it is not impossible to say that to the Japanese, it was unfathomable how a God who sacrificed Himself on the cross for them could create such a painful hurdle or heavy burden on them in order to accept His religion. This God was not responsive or accommodating at all. That must explain His silence. This was an authoritative God who required sacrifices from people even the denial of their culture and very essence which seemed to contradict one of the most fundamental and inspiring words of Christ:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Mt 11: 28-30 [RSV])

Maybe it was not God but the Christian missionaries who created the obstacles for them. This only widened the gap between Christianity and the Japanese people. Therefore, Endo appeared to have said in Silence and The Samurai that in order for Christianity to save Japan, the foreign Catholic priest had to undergo a major transformation. By the use of priests in his novels, Endo placed the burden on them to show God’s compassion and not condemnation to the world.

In Deep River, Endo brought his life long crusade of reconciling his Western faith and his Eastern culture to a remarkable conclusion. In his final novel, Endo seemed to choose an unlikely candidate to conclude his procession of priestly characters, a man who was weak, unpopular, looked down upon, and unimportant. He held no position of
authority and had no power or say in the community. Rather, he was a servant who loved greatly. His name was Otsu which means “strange” or “queer” in Japanese. Such a name may have suited him well because like Endo, he was a Japanese Catholic who was an outcast to both his culture and his religion. Otsu held views that were considered to be unorthodox or outside the mainstream by these two opposite sides of his character and personality.

First and foremost, many of the Japanese people considered him to be a traitor to their culture for being a member of the European Catholic religion and by the same token, the Catholics regarded him as being un-Christian due to his adherence to pantheistic beliefs which were a product of his Asian background. He was neither the typical traditional Catholic nor was he like the majority of his fellow Japanese, a position that Endo himself was in. He was an eccentric individual and as *Deep River* showed, Endo managed to carve a place for him in society. Ultimately, Otsu found his niche among the poor and the downtrodden, a place where Christ’s unconditional love could undoubtedly be found operating among the people today; and according to Endo, a place where a truly successful Japanese Catholic priest ought to be.

Back in his formative years, Otsu was one of a few Japanese students at his Catholic college who were baptized Christians while the majority of their counterparts were either Buddhist or members of other non-Christian groups. His kind was not considered special or elite at all. They were the least regarded by their peers even though their Catholic faith administered the school they were all attending.

There was something about these Christian students that made the other male students at the university look down on them as unapproachable, impossible to get along with, and boorish. They were not actually discriminated against, but most of them were regarded as somehow undesirable companions. (Endo 1996, 34)
This kind of treatment by the other non-Catholic students at the university may have also been warranted by the fact that Otsu frequented the chapel for mass and prayers at odd times of the day and week rather than socialized at the bars and clubs which was a more popular activity among many other young people. The life of a devout Christian was visible in Otsu. It isolated him from his Japanese schoolmates, and especially sparked the hatred of his antagonist and Endo’s Mary Magdalene figure, Mitsuko Naruse. Nonetheless, Otsu’s steadfastness in faith was a sign that he must have taken comfort in the words of Christ:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. (Jn 15: 18-20 [RSV])

Furthermore, Otsu physically stood out from the college crowd because of his strange manner of dress. In the warm days following summer break, he was seen wearing a stiflingly hot black uniform jacket walking along on campus. Perhaps Endo was entertaining notions of the dark and solemn looking uniform of a Catholic priest as a sign that Otsu was destined to become one. Mitsuko had even succeeded in seducing Otsu to carnal pleasures but he ultimately chose God and the priesthood over her. Endo seemed to use this turn of events to dispel all doubt in Otsu’s ability to keep his vows of chastity because that was not to be an issue for him throughout the rest of his life.

In fact, the major challenge for Otsu’s career as a priest was philosophical rather than moral in nature. He clashed with his own Catholic peers at seminary because of his pantheistic and pluralist views. In Otsu’s own words:

After nearly five years of living in a foreign country [France], I can’t help but be struck by the clarity and logic of the way Europeans think, but it
seems to me as an Asian that there’s something they have lost sight of with their excessive clarity and their overabundance of logic, and I just can’t go along with it. Their lucid logic and their way of explaining everything in such clear-cut terms sometimes even causes me pain.

This is partly because I’m not smart enough and haven’t studied enough to be able to understand their magnificent powers of organization, but even more than that, it’s because my Japanese sensibilities have made me feel out of harmony with European Christianity. In the final analysis, the faith of the Europeans is conscious and rational, and these people reject anything they cannot slice into categories with their rationality and their conscious minds. For five years in my daily life, in my studies of theology, and even on my trip to the Holy Land in company with my superiors in the priesthood, I have feared that I am mistaken, and I have been all alone. (Endo 1996, 117-118)

However, Otsu’s sensibilities were more favorable to the beliefs of many of his fellow Japanese. Saint Francis Xavier points out in his 1552 letter from Asia to Europe the following:

The Japanese doctrines teach absolutely nothing concerning the creation of the world, of the sun, the moon, the stars, the heavens, the earth, sea, and the rest, and do not believe that they have any origin but themselves. The people were greatly astonished on hearing it said that there is one sole Author and common Father of souls, by whom they were created. This astonishment was caused by the fact that in their religious traditions there is nowhere any mention of a Creator of the universe. If there existed one single First Cause of all things, surely, they said, the Chinese, from whom they derive their religion, must have known it. For the Japanese give the Chinese the pre-eminence in wisdom and prudence in everything relating either to religion or to political government. They asked us a multitude of questions concerning this First Cause of all things; whether He were good or bad, whether the same First Cause were the origin of good and of evil. We replied that there exists only one First Cause, and He supremely good, without any admixture of evil.

This did not satisfy them; they considered the devils to be evil by nature, and the enemies of the human race; God therefore, if He were good, could never have done such a thing as create beings so evil. To these arguments we replied that the devils were created good by God, but became evil by their own fault, and that in consequence they were subject to eternal punishment and torment. Then they objected that God, who was so severe in punishing, was not at all merciful. Again, how could He, if He created the human race in the manner we taught, allow men sent into the world to worship Him to be tempted and persecuted by the devil? In like manner, if God were good, He ought not to have made man so weak and so prone to sin, but free from all evil. Again, it could not be a good
God, they said, who had created that horrible prison of hell, and was to be forever without pity for those who suffer therein the most fearful torments from all eternity. Lastly, if He were good, He would not have imposed on men those difficult laws of the Ten Commandments. Their religious traditions, on the contrary, taught that all who should invoke the authors of their religion would be delivered even from the torments of hell. (Xavier 1552)

Therefore, the seminary could not offer Otsu what he was looking for because he believed in a God who was much more open and unchained by the perimeters of Western culture and Catholic dogma. As Otsu said to Mitsuko, “... I want to think about a form of Christianity that suits the Japanese mind” (Endo 1996, 66). However, as Robert Jonas previously mentioned, that kind of “universalistic, non-judgmental, spontaneously merciful, color/class/religion blind, and willing to see grace moving in other faiths” (Jonas 1995, 4), kind of spirituality may never gain popular footing in Japan or the West because people like to believe that their own particular cultures and religious principles are true and others must be false. This tendency to judge or belittle others concerning their cultures, languages, customs and religions is called ethnocentricism; and both Japan and Christianity are guilty of it.

In the end, it appeared that Endo did, however, find the “third religion” that he had been searching for all his life. In that separate and final dimension, he found a way for him, the Otsus of the world, and most importantly, his Japanese countrymen to savor and maintain the love of a higher power. Endo would never be an outcast again. He could be anyone or anything: an Asian, a European, a Catholic, a Buddhist, or a Hindu; and still feel welcome and whole, because according to him that salvific force did not belong to any particular culture, religion or institution. That figure was the one whom the Christians claimed as their own but He was actually everyone’s companion and friend regardless of whether or not He was on a different plane from humanity. As was
previously noted, that third medium or person is Jesus Christ, the “man with many faces” and a “man for all” to whom Otsu . . . and Endo were faithful disciples.

According to Endo, Christ’s appeal was not found in His divinity but rather in His humanity. Throughout Endo’s novels, Christ was not presented as a triumphant hero or an all powerful deity. Instead, He was stripped of all the superficial facades of the world in order to make Him accessible to Endo’s Japanese and foreign characters alike. After all, an almighty and powerful God did not appeal to the Japanese who could not fathom a deity that was distant or immune to human experience. Jesus Christ is God in human form. He chose to become human out of compassion for humanity. Therefore, love must be the most godly act of all. It is not of this world. It was not created by a priest, a missionary, or even a novelist because compassion is a divine trait instituted by God.

Christ may have been placed at the bottom of the totem pole in Endo’s literature but it was from there that His message of unconditional love and compassion for all people could not be distorted by the limitations of worldly positions or stature. He was presented as a lowly, ugly, exhausted, and abandoned figure that anyone could relate to at some point in their lives for He took upon Himself the burden of the weight of the world. Perhaps the words of the prophet, Isaiah, can best describe Him:

. . . [H]e had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and
judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his land; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Is 53 [RSV])

Endo’s preference for Christ in *Deep River* might seem to some as alleviating the impossible burden on the Catholic Church and its priests to close the gap between Japan and Catholicism perhaps by “Japanizing” Christianity. After all, Christ transcended cultures and religions or did He not? John Netland, Professor of English at Union University in Jackson, Tennesse, and the 2010 winner of the Lionel Basney Award does not think so. Netland wrote:

While Otsu himself never abandons the Church nor his radical commitment to Jesus, his assumptions about the relationship of the Christian faith to human cultures are troubling. Cultural identity, for Otsu, seems to be nearly immutable, and he comes precariously close to subordinating religious practice to cultural identity. Hence, it is like Christianity is perceived to be too closely aligned with a particular culture, it might be seen as culturally inauthentic within another. The task of translating the faith from western to eastern cultures might then be perceived as a fool’s errand at best, at worst, an assault on those eastern cultures.

The curious paradox for Endo, as for his character, Otsu, is that he remained a devout Catholic to the end of his life . . . but his project to re-tailor the Christian faith in culturally-congruent garb seems by the end of his life to have moved much closer to a form of religious pluralism. Culture, it seems, assumes priority in defining the human dispositions that shape one’s religious beliefs and practices. The possibilities of religious experience become demarcated by culture and its seminal role in shaping human identity. Not insignificantly, the characters in Endo’s fiction who do end up in Jesus’ grasp . . . are the cultural anomalies: the betrayers and
betrayed, the apostates and seminary dropouts, the disillusioned and disenfranchised. The ones most closely identified as representative of Japanese culture remain alienated by, and often hostile towards, the Christian faith. Perhaps Endo means no more than that following Jesus is deeply counter-cultural in any society, yet he also suggests repeatedly that for the Japanese people, professing faith in Jesus Christ seems to demand a form of cultural renunciation not demanded of western Christians. The personal and cultural cost of such renunciation seems, to Endo, to have become too great, and in his conclusion Endo seems to be joined by increasing numbers of contemporary Christians who wonder if the gospel that missionaries have brought to many non-western nations does not amount to a form of cultural suppression. (Netland 2008, 3-4)

So, some could conclude that Endo’s life long crusade to reconcile Japan and Christianity may have been in vain because even though he advocated Christ as a unifying force of love and compassion, both sides of the debate still could not get past their cultural and religious prejudices. Nonetheless, the fact that Endo did not leave the Catholic Church spoke volumes that he still believed that the heavy burden, the labor of love, still rested in the hands of the Church to make the message of Christ relevant to Japan and the world.

Endo may not have been a priest or a theologian in real life but by the nature of his novels, it can be said that he created priests in his fiction to highlight the special role of the Catholic clergy in making Christ and His message more appealing to the “swamp” of Japan. If no actual priest could do it, he would have to create one who could. That is what is so special and powerful about the world of literature. There is a unique capacity for literature to move and sway reality through the exposition and analysis of information in the exciting and boundless world of fiction.

As such, Endo must have realized this special power early on especially since he was overpowered himself in other ways due to his poor health. His own outlet or power of persuasion was through his writing. If he could not be a priest, then he could be one
through his literature. He must have felt that he did not have to become a priest in order to share an inspirational message to the world, that Christ is not a superhero but a sure companion in times of need. So, he fiddled with the priests in his novels and he molded them according to his understanding of what it meant to be a man for others.

Fortunately, the importance and urgency of Endo’s mission may have been understood and appreciated by the Catholic Church as evident in two of Endo’s books in this study, Volcano and Silence, which were translated into English by Catholic priests, Richard Schuchert and William Johnston. Moreover, it may also be said that the other non-Catholic religions were on board as well since the Mormon scholar, Van C. Gessel, translated the other two novels, The Samurai and Deep River. Together, these authors recognized the power of literature.

On March 11, 2011, many sources reported that Japan was shaken by an 8.9 magnitude earthquake and subsequently devastated by a tsunami with waves up to 124 feet high killing and displacing thousands of people, and affecting millions of households. While some may have been quick to say that this natural disaster was God’s punishment of the Japanese people for not accepting Jesus Christ as their savior, they need only look at the work of Catholic Relief Services, Caritas Internationalis, and other Christian organizations which rushed to the aid of the suffering. Perhaps, the Japanese people could look very closely at the entire incident and begin to recognize God’s love and compassion through the actions of His followers. As they say, “Actions speak louder than words.”
REFERENCE LIST


