MULTICULTURALISM, DEATH, FAITH AND ITS LIMITS

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Abstract: This essay discusses some topics related to the problems of faith and, above all, of how people experience the limit(s) of their consciousness and of the world they live in. The main concern is to show how these issues are expressed in modern literature and especially within the specific field of modern Japanese literature. Therefore, our demonstration is stressed upon Shusaku Endo's work, taking into consideration his unusual personal experience within Christianity. The author himself often spoke of Christianity as an ill-fitted suit for his Japanese frame. In this respect, we may state that what Endo inherited rightly was his vision of the world, a sacramental worldview that sees human action within the grand narrative of God's redeeming activity in the world.

Keywords: faith, Catholicism, limit, death, tragic, modern Japanese literature, Christianity, multiculturalism.

Japanese novelist Shusaku Endo (1923 – 1996) had a long career of writing that toyed with paradoxes that put opposing forces in juxtaposition with one another and the sought of reconciliation. One of his most persistent themes, also popularized by other significant contemporary authors such as Salman Rushdie or Kazuo Ishiguro, was to address the cultural clash between East and West, in his particular case, especially in its relationship to Christianity, as the perfect example of multiculturalism within the 20th century literature. Perhaps this is not a completely new problem in the context of the Japanese literature, but one which Endo inherited from his predecessors, a long line of writers and intellectuals of the Meiji epoch begun in 1868.

Still, Shusaku Endo is the first Catholic to discuss it with such force and, to quote William Johnston, Endo's translator into English, "to draw the clear-cut conclusion that Christianity must adapt itself radically if it is to take root in the <<swamp>> of Japan."[1] Somehow a stranger in his own land, a Roman Catholic writer in a country historically hostile to Christian faith, Endo was often compared throughout his career to writers like Georges Bernanos, Flannery O'Connor or Graham Greene. His concern with the clash of cultures was the product and manifestation of an alien religion forced upon him in his youth: "I became a Catholic against my will"[2], we would say. Therefore he sought to reconcile this Western faith with the legacy of the East, and in doing so he saw both East and West bend and sometimes break. Endo emerged from a generation of pre-World War II Japanese Christian writers who struggled to maintain their faith in light of cultural identification as Japanese. His is a vision "of orthodoxy acculturation"[3]: in this respect, the novel *Silence* will be the main focus, particularly its climactic scene where the protagonist is confronted both with the option of committing apostasy in order to save the tortured

[1] William Johnston, *Translator's Preface*, in *Silence* by Shusaku Endo (New York, 1980), XV.
[2] Ibid., xvi.
[3] Brett R. Dewey, op. cit., 2.

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peasants and a mystical vision of a suffering and redeeming Christ. In this scene, as we will see, Endo appears as having a robustly Catholic sacramental view of the world and, at the same time, he succeeds in shaping his Catholicism in a way distinctly Japanese. Therefore, we may agree with Brett R. Dewey: "His is a literature of liberation from Western theological imperialism, and yet radically Catholic."[4]

The interesting fact as far as this matter is concerned was that for the Christian writers in Japan at that particular time, "their faith gave way to a kind of humanism, or to a special mode of thought and style known in Japan as 'naturalism'."[5] Within this context, Shusaku Endo is given credit for the increased acceptance of Christianity in Japanese literature. Some critics considered that this happened exactly because Endo offered a sound rebuttal to the kind of naturalism that plagued the pre-war generation; this rebuttal is not attempted on a philosophical level, but primarily on the literary one, with a clearly Catholic core; still, whether in Japan or in the West, the debate about 'naturalism' and its forms in literature was nothing new to Endo. He was interested in the interstices of religious and cultural contradiction: a redeemer who does not rise, an all-powerful god who is weak, an Easterner in the West, as in his work *The Samurai*, or a Westerner in the East, as in his last novel *The Deep River*, or his most famous book, *Silence* – all of these are comparable to the Hegelian thesis / antithesis pairs from which he seeks to create a synthesis. It is his well-known novel *Silence* (1969), treating the first insertions of West into East, the period in which Portuguese Jesuit missionaries attempted to bring Christianity to Japan that may serve the reader as an exercise in paradoxical moral choices, a window from East to West and West to East. The title itself is meaningful on many levels: it is at once the silence of the East when faced with the onslaughts of the West, the silence of the West as it fails to fathom the East, the silence of the samurai who seek to rid their islands of Christianity, the silence of the missionaries as they hide from persecutions and martyrdom and, above all, the silence of the Western god in the face of suffering of the innocent. The silence is broken only by the consequences of moral action: the suffering of the tortured, the screams of the dying, the casuistry of those who recant their faith. And, again, above all, the cry of the peasant Christians, as they ask "Why?"

The book deals with the terrible persecutions Christians were subject to during the 17th century. All these tortures produced thousands of martyrs and, subsequently, a fascinating underground hybrid church called "Kakuro", which survived hundreds of years in secret, and an enduring ambiguous relationship between Japanese culture and Catholicism. The author used these themes in almost all his novels and short stories. Endo, baptized at the age of eleven because his mother had turned to faith in the wake of personal difficulties, described his Catholicism as "a kind of ready-made suit… I had to decide either to make this ready-made suit fit my body or get rid of it and find another suit that fitted…There were many times when I felt I wanted to get rid of my Catholicism, but I was finally unable to do so."[6] As a Christian child in Japan, he was taunted by his peers for his religion. As a student come to France after World War II to study Catholic novelists, his

[4] Ibid., 2.
[5] David L. Swain, "The Anguish of an Alien: Confessions of a Japanese Christian", *The Christian Century* 112, no. 34 (Chicago, Illinois, November 1995), 1120.
[6] William Johnston, op. cit.,. xvi.

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faith was irrelevant to those who may have shared it, but who deplored him nonetheless because he was Japanese. It seemed, at that point, that it would have to be the suit that changed – it brought him nothing but suffering.

Endo remains one of Japan's great 20th century authors, and like Walker Percy or Graham Greene, he is a Catholic who spent a good portion of his literary career writing about faith and the struggle with it. For example, in *Silence* he asks a question people don't usually want to face: it's the same question that Jesus asked as he suffered on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Therefore, the silence analyzed by Endo is the silence of God confronted with all these awful events. Still, while the main character of the novel, the priest Sebastian Rodrigues, struggles with these problems, with this silence and above all with his own faith, the book as a whole turns to be self-affirming. Like Miguel de Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno, Martir* (the story of a priest who does not believe in the resurrection), the loss of faith equates to a loss of purpose, a loss of strength and a loss of humanity which paints the power of God – silent though he may be – much more powerfully than words could ever do.

While engaged in the struggle, Rodrigues and his brother priests and Christians have a strength to which the reader really gravitates. When they lose their struggle, they become (repeatedly Endo uses this word to such powerful effect): "servile". How ironic: when characters place themselves at the service of God, they are "pillars of strength"; when they reject faith-driven duty, they become "servile"… Of course, Shusaku Endo's work is not so simply reduced. The specific circumstances of his characters and priests make us think what we would have done if we were in their place. As one character comments on a group of Japanese Christians that are being tortured mercilessly, "certainly Christ would have apostatized for them."[7] Some critics found rather blasphemous to think or write this way, but Endo did so and succeeded in remaining a Catholic. No doubt, however, one who for better or worse, confronts the historical and philosophical questions of his religion.

In this exquisite novel, Endo uses the background of persecutions to contemplate all these problems and many other as well. The novel can be read on many levels, but it is primarily a book about suffering and redemption, nature and grace, life and death. The author is fully aware of the intricate debate on grace, nature and death, expressing an opinion critical of reducing all things to the natural and equally critical of casting the hope of the Church into an escapist future. Within this context, he writes his book about a young Portuguese Jesuit, father Sebastian Rodrigues. At the same time, *Silence* presents an autobiographically charged assault on what Endo sees as a vision of a triumphant Christ indicative of Western Christianity. His resolution to what he sees as a cultural and theological problem, arrived at through a driving, sparse and haunting narrative style, can only be described as a product of his "christocentric imagination"[8]. The writer presents a new image of Christ that resolves, however imperfectly, the cultural and theological tensions of a traditional Catholicism seeking headway in Japan. There is something to François Mauriac's self-description, "I am a metaphysician who works in the concrete"

[7] Shusaku Endo, *Silence*. Translated by William Johnston (New York, 1980), 123.
[8] Brett R. Dewey, op. cit., 4.

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that rings true in Shusaku Endo. In fact, there is little doubt that Endo was shaped, at some extent, by reflections on the life of Jesus, having followed the steps of his literary forefather Mauriac in writing an account of the Divine Being.

In the final attempt to convince the captured priest to turn traitor, his former mentor Ferreira is brought in. The long years of speculation as to Ferreira's fate are answered when he enters the room. The teacher is now at the behest of the government, performing scholarly duties, translating Western texts and even writing an anti-Christian apologetic. He has taken a Japanese name and a Japanese wife and has already given up all hope for Christianity flourishing in such a country; he protests that he is still, in some diminished capacity, useful to those whom he originally came to serve. Ferreira now appears completely and for ever in the employ of the Japanese magistrates and reveals the reason for his apostasy: Christian peasants had been hung in the pit and Ferreira was told that they would not be released until he denied his faith. The same choice now faces Rodrigues: three peasants hang in the pit moaning piteously; unless Rodrigues tramples on the "fumie", on the face of Christ he has loved for so long, they will die a slow and terrible death. After all, how grand could this Jesus be if priests walk across His face? In this manner, the representatives of the new Tokugawa shogunate thought they could devalue the Christian message and cut its roots, hoping it would soon die out completely.

The dilemma itself may be simple, but the questions it raises are not. Can a Christian let others suffer for his beliefs? One may think of precedents in Christian history and there are many of them. Still, like the above mentioned Japanese translator, Christovao Ferreira functions as a mouthpiece for the "virtue" of apostasy. The Church can perform societal good, according to Ferreira, only by leaving the Japanese people alone. When confronted with why he himself apostatized, Ferreira readily admitted that, as peasants hung in the pit, their moans within hearing distance, he realized he must do something for them simply because God did nothing: "God did not a single thing and I prayed with all my strength; but God did nothing."[9] Having lost faith in God and the Church, Ferreira did the only thing he thought he could do for the tortured peasants. Does Ferreira convince Rodrigues and Endo? Does the translator? Do they convince the reader? Do the translator's words ring loud in Rodrigues' ears that Japan is a "mud-swamp incapable of supporting the roots of Christianity"? Is this why he tramples on the "fumie" representing Christ? As in an answer to all these questions, in the most shocking twist of the novel, Jesus himself makes his appearance. The haunting silence of God is finally broken; the face of Jesus, constantly on the mind of Rodrigues throughout the whole novel, appears in the end and speaks a word of permission. But many details are different from what the character expected: "Yet the face was different from that on which the priest has gazed so often in Portugal, in Rome, in Goa and in Macao. It was not Christ whose face was filled with majesty and glory; neither was it a face made beautiful by endurance to pain; nor was it a face with strength of a will that has repelled temptation. The face of the man who then lay at his feet [in the fumie] was sunken and utterly exhausted… The sorrow it had gazed up at him [Rodrigues] as the eyes spoke appealingly: 'Trample! Trample! It is to be trampled on by you that I am here."

[9] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 182.

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The triumphant Christ of the West, dominant in the mind's eye of Rodrigues until now, has shifted to a kenotic Christ, somehow emptied and broken. The silence of God, then, is broken in no triumphant blaring of horns or in a shadow of divine might, but in a paradox and mystery of divine suffering. God is silent to suffering, but at the same time is suffering alongside creation. The beautiful vision, this face-to-face encounter with God, is turned upside down: the suffering Christ who encourages so-called apostasy embodies a radical image of God. This is a necessary picture within this novel: our natural longing for God equally matches God's desire to relate and engage the human. In the end, the soothing hymnody of the persecuted Japanese Christians: "We're on our way to the temple of Paradise,/ To the great Temple…" affirms our basic nature to seek the unmoved Mover, while God has shown himself involved in the affairs of the world. Escapist-future eschatological and simplistic or naturalistic interpretations of Endo crumble: the writer's vision of a graced nature permeates his entire project. The exclusively future hope of the peasants and the naturalistic goals of the translator are both equally critiqued.

In trampling the "fumie", Rodrigues frees the peasants. It is an action, partaking in the action of God, which bears fruit among the people. In treading on the image of the savior, Rodrigues is not committing apostasy after all. On the contrary, he is affirming the true vocation of Christ; he is partaking in divine mission. The Portuguese priest sacrifices himself, including his pride and place as an upstanding member of the clergy, in order to participate with God in a redemptive suffering that seeks the ultimate liberation of the poor people. So Rodrigues trample, but his trampling hurts; it is not just a formality, as the translator would hope us to think. The author writes: "The priest raises his foot. In it he feels a dull, heavy pain. This is no mere formality. He will now trample on what he has considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he has believed most pure, on what is filled with the ideals and the dreams of man." Endo concludes, therefore: "How his foot aches!"[10] Suffering the victory of God hurts and implies a divine patience and victory that rests not on societal fixes or divine fiat, but on human participation in the long suffering of God. Grace and nature are one; our history is participation in salvation history.

Salvation is now, in suffering not political parties, government structures or future-oriented hopes. The free offering of God is preserved in this rendering: "Trample!" meaning, in fact, "You may trample, I allow you to trample." So we can say with Flannery O'Connor that "there is nothing in our faith that implies a foregone optimism for man so free that with his last breath he can say 'No'."[11] In fact, the deeper issue here, in the novel of Shusaku Endo, is suffering for the sake of Christ. Jesus makes clear in the Gospels that his followers must take up their cross; as Jesus says in Luke, "They will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name." As perhaps only a great novel can, *Silence* probes the strangeness of the Incarnation and death of Christ, the mystery of a God who does not simply wipe away the world's suffering, but chooses to share it. This goes to the heart of Rodrigues' questions about God's silence: why does God not speak in the face of so much human agony? Endo drops hints that Rodrigues is tempted to apostatize to save

[10] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 197.
[11] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners* (New York, 2001), 182.

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the peasants, simply because he believes God will not save them. But on the other hand, the author suggests that Rodrigues does indeed hear God break this silence, in the moment he was advised to trample on the "fumie": "Trample! It was to be trampled on by men I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross."[12] God has spoken to the suffering of the world in giving the Word, Jesus Christ, made incarnate to suffer the pain of humanity. In this respect, Ferreira puts the argument to Rodrigues: "A priest ought to live in imitation of Christ. And certainly Christ would have apostatized for [these peasants]."[13] In this novel, Endo's character of Ferreira serves as a goad to Rodrigues' pride; it is Rodrigues' pride, hidden behind his self-abnegating journey toward martyrdom that sets up the climactic scene in the book. As he sets his face toward Japan, Rodrigues writes some letters in dread-filled yet fascinated tones of the perils that await him. The young priest is haunted and feels himself pulled toward Japan, by a vivid vision of the face of Christ.

Endo compels us to admire the Jesuit's willingness to face up any torture for the sake of the holy gospel, and we (the readers) have no doubt that he has strength to die for Christ. But the novelist subtly lets Rodrigues overplay his courage until it touches on pride: in the end, he risks violating the church's stern admonition that a Catholic must never seek martyrdom…A deep moral ambiguity suffuses the story and opens a wound that endures long after the reader puts the book down. In fact, it is the particular God *Silence* speaks about the one who refuses to close the wound; he has chosen not to eliminate the suffering, but to suffer with this poor humanity. It is this Jesus who haunts Father Sebastian Rodrigues, the main character of Endo's novel.

Though Rodrigues' turmoil over stepping on the "fumie" was intensely personal, Endo's vision of the gospel is not at all individualistic, for it ends with the Church in Japan passing on traditions and forms suitable to the Japanese. It is a gospel with its roots in the radical nature of God-with-us, and finds social embodiment in the Church, even if authorities of the West would rather condemn the Church that is represented at the end of *Silence*. As the book ends and Rodrigues listens to Kichijiro's confession, the priest affirms that "Even now I am the last priest in this land. But Our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day would have spoken of him."[14] *Silence* is as a whole a grave book about Church and culture, triumph and suffering. But most of all, the novel is about presenting a human nature bent towards God and a God towards his people. In effect, *Silence* asks if there is only one kind of martyrdom: could one sacrifice not only one's body, but one's very moral integrity for the sake of others? The author gently inflates Rodrigues' pride precisely to raise this particular question. The Jesuit seeks at one point physical martyrdom as a prize. He wants to atone for the sin of Ferreira and share a martyr's glorious triumph over sin and death. But Endo suggests that a deeper martyrdom may await Rodrigues: the death of his very self as a Christian and as a moral person. This suggests that the standard concept of heroic virtue is radically effaced by the logic of God's kenosis, by God's self-emptying to take the form of a slave, as Paul puts it in Philippians. In this novel, Shusaku Endo provocatively pushes basic Christian logic,

[12] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 175
[13] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 170
[14] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 112.

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already paradoxical, to a more extreme conclusion. If it is true, as many Christian martyrs have affirmed, that for the Christian, the body is as nothing when compared to the eternity of the soul then is the crucifixion of the soul a martyrdom which makes other martyrdoms pale in comparison? In any case, those who look for tidy endings should not read *Silence*. For after all, Endo is not interested in deciding if Rodrigues did the right thing. His novel is a meditation on the Incarnation, not a handbook of morals. Christ continuing torment of human beings is the strange drama of a somehow homeless God who suffers with us. "It is precisely in this apparent silence, in this self-emptying, that salvation unfolds"[15], as William Cavanaugh argues.

It is not, however, only the theological questions Endo raises, that interests us here. Rather, the moral dilemmas that the author places before Rodrigues and the ethical problems he discusses are some essential points of insertion for the Western reader: Endo seems to ask that we bracket the question of the property of missionary work or, as he himself puts it, how to cultivate the seed of Christianity in the swamp of Japan; instead, Rodrigues' options, strictly and narrowly delineated, are the substance of the novel. Of course, the first dilemma Rodrigues faces is what to do with Kichijiro: in doing so, Endo creates a complication that adds an acerbic twist to both characters. The apostate Japanese is aware of his own weakness and need for mercy and yet he is exactly as he was created to be. Should not that god who created him thus then give him the strength to either persevere in his faith or break away from it altogether? Conflicting desires create a character which is, like the rest of us all, human in his frailty and weak in his vice. Eventually, Rodrigues sees the parallels between his life and the life of Kichijiro: they are both weak. As Peter Alig put it, "Through the course of Rodrigues' arrival in Japan, eventual apostasy and loss of identity, he comes to identify an equality between himself and Kichijiro, an equality based on the need for love in the midst of failure."[16]

The climactic moral question Rodrigues faces is to apostatize or hold on to his faith. But this question, like that of Kichijiro, is not as simple as it appears on the surface: if he apostatizes, he is told, he may spare other Christians from torture; after all, he has been sent to Japan as a shepherd to these peasants. But is really his apostasy in their best interest? Is it in his best interest? In the selfish calculus that is historical Tomistic doctrine, one must be concerned first and foremost with the salvation of one's soul. Does Rodrigues publicly renounce his faith, putting his soul in jeopardy, in order to spare others from death? Or does he turn his back on those whom he has been sent to minister to? This dilemma cannot be unpacked easily. Can Rodrigues publicly split from the visible church? And what effect will this have on the Christians he has come to help? Which is worth more in this triangle: his own public commitment, the lives of these particular Christians or the existence of small groups of Christians throughout the island? But that is not where Endo leaves Rodrigues: he throws another weight on the scale. In fact, these "Christians" before him are actually peasants who have already renounced their faith and they are suffering

[15] William Cavanaugh, "*An Apocalyptic Reading of Endo's <<Silence>>"*, in *Logos* 2 (Wayne, Summer 1999), 114.
[16]Peter Alig, "Power in Disgrace: Shusaku Endo and the Faces of Belonging and Exile", *Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty Papers* (Ottawa, 1996), 98.

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torture anyway; does that change the equation at all? Rodrigues must choose one of these options: abnegate his responsibility or abnegate his own pride.

In other works, especially in his last novel, *The Deep River*, Endo argues that the recognition of weakness and the concomitant denial of one's own place in the world is a necessary step toward wholeness. Ferreira hints at this conclusion himself, when he addresses his old pupil. Sitting behind this pressing moral issue is something less spectacular, but far more grave. Rodrigues may, in the words of James E. Barcus, "be at best loving an illusion or at worst deceiving himself. […] Trampling on the face of Christ, rather than being an act of apostasy, confirms Ferreira's position that Western Christianity has no future in Japan and that the Christianity the 'fumie' represents is merely another pagan religion."[17] More than that, Endo here calls into question the project of missionary work in general: Ferreira himself argues with Rodrigues that "Xavier's early success, the singular motivation for later generations of Jesuits, was illusory."[18] After all, another message of this powerful and grave novel is that, upon reflection, nothing is as originally seems: apparent goods may be discovered to be flawed. Apparent evils may be ultimate goods. Endo's view, that all moral decisions are subject to greater and greater scrutiny as more information is gathered, is certainly foreign to most Westerners. Like David Hume, the Scottish empiricist, Endo insists that moral decisions are based on fellow-feeling and on the strength of emotional ties, not on the objective code of ethics that exists somewhere outside the self. It is Rodrigues' concern, finally, for the peasants he has come to minister to that gives him the strength to trample on the "fumie". Ferreira's arguments and historical speculations may have helped him along, but in the end it is fellow-feeling that frees him. Of course, in his own turn, Endo leaves us his final paradoxical, tail-chasing question: which comes first, the individual or the community? In opting for one community, the peasants who are being tortured, Rodrigues harms another, the other Christians on the island and perhaps, as his opponents hope, the church throughout the world. But Endo's character is finally able to shut out the demands of the church militant to focus on these specific individuals and on his own life. He somehow moves outside himself, at the risk of damning his own soul. Whether or not this personal ethic is compatible with Western Christianity is not really the author's concern within this novel, although at certain points he seems to say that it is or may as well be. In fact, the triumphalist voices of both East and West will not condone Rodrigues' moral self-abnegation and will see his triumph as a complete failure… His most powerful image remains, then, somehow in the middle and somewhere between the individual and the world, somewhere between Christianity, Shintoism and Buddhism, between East and West, standing on the face of Christ, a part of his own soul dying at once, as doing this.

While there are many other messages present within Endo's words, the most prevalent being how to believe in a god whose only answer is silence, his novel is a useful instructional tool when attempting to view into the nature of Japanese religion; it is the clear window necessary to understand it. From this perspective, Inoue and Ferreira are

[17] James E. Barcus, "For the Love of God: The Problem of Spiritual Awakening in Endo's <<Silence>>", in *Performance for a Lifetime: A Festschrift Honoring Dorothy Harrell Brown: Essays on Women, Religion and the Renaissance*. Barbara C. Ewell and Mary A McCay, eds. (New Orleans, 1997), 65.
[18] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 187.

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correct: the Japanese are willing to assimilate outside influences, but in doing so, they have a unique quality which allows them to retain their identity while recreating the assimilated element until it becomes by nature Japanese. Exactly because of all these Christianity was never able to spread into more than a simple cult in Japan as far as its very nature demands that its followers neglect their pre-existing beliefs for the belief in God as the one and only god. Unlike Buddhism, for instance, Christianity does not allow for lesser gods under the supreme Divine. In this respect, it must be remembered that the plurality of Japanese thought is common throughout the East; it is only in the West where one finds the exclusivity so often found in the Greco-Roman preoccupation with logos and the Judeo-Christian and even Muslim traditions. Japanese culture in general relishes the influx of other cultures, but it does so with the overriding understanding that once the other has been accepted, it has also been changed, so that the other becomes the native. Yes, it is true that Buddhism flourished here, but it was substantially changed into "the unique living product of its diverse origins and their combination with native elements"[19], as Earhart put it in its often cited study *Japanese Experience*. It was no longer what it had been before coming to Japan; it became Japanese. The well-known strain of Pure Land Buddhism, with its devotion to Amida Buddha, and the ever popular Zen Buddhism are both Japanese developments of the religion's theology. So the Japanese did not simply convert to an outside religion; in fact, they developed forms of Buddhism which would fit the Japanese mindset. For example, in Endo's *Silence*, Rodrigues tells Inoue that "according to our way of thinking, truth is universal. […] It is precisely because truth is common to all countries and all times that we call it truth."[20] This is seemingly true to the Western ear, but for Inoue and his people, truth must be Japanese to be completely true. Like the already mentioned image of the "swamp", the nature metaphor is used once again: Inoue asks Father Rodrigues if all trees are able to survive in the same soil. As he himself admits, the Governor of Chikugo did not believe Christianity was an evil religion; rather, it was more like a barren woman, who "has not the capacity to be a wife" because the union will end there, without propagating and growing, just like Christianity was doomed to fail in Japan because it was not capable of reproducing within the collective Japanese consciousness. Rodrigues' mentor himself, Christovao Ferreira, had abandoned the cause, believing the Japanese incapable of conceiving a god like theirs. The very word used for Him in their Portuguese language, "Deus", was pronounced by the Japanese (even by the Christians) very similar to "Dainichi", the name of the central Buddha, the one who is above all others. Therefore, in this sense, from the very beginning, the Japanese had misinterpreted the Christian God in terms of their own supreme deity. Or, in Ferreira's words: "From the very beginning, those same Japanese who confused 'Deus' to 'Dainichi' twisted and changed our God and began to create something different. […] The Japanese believed not in the Christian God but in their own distortion."[21]

At the end of the novel we learn that Rodrigues had to change his name and adopt a Japanese one, of course, after having apostatized. Still, maybe all is not lost: certainly,

[19] David L. Swain, "*The Anguish of an Alien: Confessions of a Japanese Christian"*, *The Christian Century* 112, no. 34 (Chicago, Illinois, November 1995), 1120.
[20] Shusaku Endo, op. cit., 175.
[21] Ibid., 182.

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Christianity will never flourish in Japan, Rodrigues's experiences and Inoue's efforts to thwart its success hit this very point. But we have to keep in mind that in Japan religion is primarily a spiritual matter, not a dogmatic one: duality is allowed and so maybe God is present here alongside the Buddhas and the Shinto kamis. Maybe God's ways really are much more complex than the reader may perceive at first opening Endo's novel.

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