

*Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith  
Born of Suffering*

Available May 2016

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## The “Imperceptible and Deliberate Divine Guidance” of Endo’s *Silence*

“My personal encounter in the late 1980s with fumi-e displayed at the Tokyo National Museum led me to read Endo’s masterpiece, *Silence*,” writes Makoto Fujimura in his new book *Silence and Beauty*. “As I write this, the novel is being made into a major motion picture by the master filmmaker Martin Scorsese. A good friend of mine introduced me to Scorsese, and my conversation with him compelled me to write this book. The timing of my writing seems foreplanned by imperceptible and deliberate divine guidance, and as I write this, I am simply peeling away at my own experience to the core of such providence. My journey of faith, like the surface of my paintings, is multilayered. Deep contemplation, and holding onto a point of stillness, will be required if the reader desires to fully benefit from this book. My writing will seem refractive in nature too, with prismatic light of beauty, art and faith emerging from many thematic layers: current events, life practices and stewarding what I call the ‘ecology of culture toward culture care.’”

“Readers, especially Japanese readers, may wonder what Mr. Scorsese would find of interest in Shusaku Endo’s writings, so much so that he would spend decades making this film one of his life works. . . . As part of the mystery being revealed in this book, I want to pursue why *Silence* has had a profound effect on postwar American intellectuals, perhaps just as profound as its impact on their Japanese counterparts. Some of the director’s earlier films sparked culture wars reactions, and this book may serve as a guide to those who desire to move beyond the boycotting of culture Christians are known for, a guide toward deeper reflections on culture and a guide to the deeper reading of *Silence*.”

- *Silence*, by Shusaku Endo, is a postwar story of a Jesuit missionary sent to seventeenth-century Japan, who endures persecution in the time of Kakure Kirishitan (“Hidden Christians”) that followed the defeat of the Shimabara Rebellion. The recipient of the 1966 Tanizaki Prize, *Silence* has been called “Endo’s supreme achievement” and “one of the twentieth century’s finest novels.” When did you first encounter his work?
- You write that Shusaku Endo is known for his “shockingly honest depictions of pain, torture and comical failures.” Likewise, Martin Scorsese, director of the forthcoming film based on the novel, is also known for honest depictions of pain. Yet your book is titled *Silence and Beauty*. How did the beauty component of this work come into play for you?
- As an artist, how does the image and meaning of the *fumi-e* come into play in your grappling with the trauma outlined in Endo’s novel?
- How do you hope readers and viewers can engage with both your book and the new Martin Scorsese film based on Endo’s novel?

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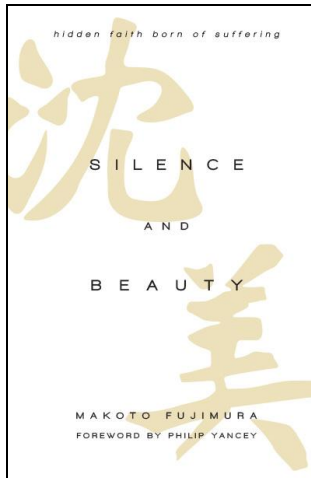


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*"Only Mako Fujimura could have written this book. It sheds light on a wealth of topics – a classic novel, Japanese culture, Martin Scorsese's filmmaking, the fine arts, theology, the enigmas of East and West – and leaves the reader with a startlingly new encounter with Christ."*

– Philip Yancey

## Bringing Beauty to Shusaku Endo's *Silence*

*From Philip Yancey's foreword of Silence and Beauty, Makoto Fujimura's new book.*

Christian martyrs regularly make the news. From places like Nigeria, Iraq and Syria, the media report on believers persecuted and killed by the Islamic State and other radical groups. And who can forget the scene of orange-clad Egyptian Christians kneeling by the Libyan surf, mouthing prayers, just before jihadists slash their heads from their bodies. All these join a host of martyrs from the twentieth century, which produced more martyrs than all previous centuries combined.

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," wrote the early church father Tertullian, and indeed in many places persecution gave rise to times of remarkable growth. But what of those who recant? In Rome, in Nazi Germany, in Stalinist Russia and Maoist China, some pastors and ordinary believers either publicly renounced their deepest beliefs or stayed silent. Who tells their stories?

In Japan the blood of the martyrs led to the near annihilation of the church. Francis Xavier, one of the seven original Jesuits, landed there in 1549 and planted a church that within a generation had swelled to 300,000 members. Xavier called Japan "the country in the Orient most suited to Christianity." Before long, however, the Japanese warlords grew wary of foreign influence. They decided to expel the Jesuits and require that all Christians repudiate their faith and register as Buddhists. To dramatize the change in policy, in 1629 they arrested twenty-six Christians – six foreign missionaries and twenty Japanese Christians, including three young boys – mutilated their ears and noses, and force-marched them some five hundred miles. Upon arrival in Nagasaki, the focal point of Japan's Christian community, the prisoners were led to a hill, crucified and pierced with spears. The era of persecution had begun, on what became known as Martyrs Hill.

Japanese culture deemed suicide an honorable act, and rulers feared that too many martyrs might enhance the church's reputation and spread its influence. Instead, in a society that values loyalty and "saving face," the warlords gave priority to making the Christians renounce their faith in a public display. They must trample on the *fumi-e*, a bronze portrait of Jesus or Mary mounted on a wooden frame, and thus de-face their most revered symbols. Not just once, they had to step on the *fumi-e* every New Year's Day in order to prove they had decisively left the outlawed religion.

The Japanese who stepped on the *fumi-e* were pronounced apostate Christians and set free. Those who refused, the magistrates hunted down and killed. Some were tied to stakes in the



**Makoto Fujimura** is an internationally renowned artist, writer and speaker who serves as the director of Fuller Seminary's Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and the Arts. He is also the founder of the International Arts Movement and served as a presidential appointee to the National Council on the Arts from 2003 to 2009. His books include *Refractions: A Journey of Faith, Art and Culture* and *Culture Care*.

Recognized worldwide as a cultural shaper, Fujimura's work has been exhibited at galleries including Dillon Gallery in New York, Sato Museum in Tokyo, The Contemporary Museum of Tokyo, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts Museum, Bentley Gallery in Arizona, Taikoo Place in Hong Kong and Vienna's Belvedere Museum. In 2011 the Fujimura Institute was established and launched the Qu4rtets, a collaboration between

sea to await high tides that would slowly drown them, while others were bound and tossed off rafts; some were scalded in boiling hot springs, and still others were hung upside down over a pit full of dead bodies and excrement.

Mako Fujimura writes of standing on Martyrs Hill, a mile from Nagasaki's ground zero. In one of history's cruel ironies, the second atomic bomb exploded directly above Japan's largest congregation of Christians, many of whom had gathered for mass at the cathedral. (Clouds obscured the intended city, forcing the bombing crew to select an alternate target.) In the end, more Christians died in the atomic destruction of Nagasaki than in the centuries of persecution that followed the deaths of the twenty-six martyrs in 1597, for over the years by far the majority of believers had apostatized.

In the 1950s a young writer named Shusaku Endo visited a nearby museum to begin research on his next novel, which he planned to set in the devastation of postwar Nagasaki. He stood gazing at one particular glass case, which displayed a fumi-e from the seventeenth century. Blackened marks on the wooden frame surrounding the bronze portrait of Mary and Jesus, itself worn smooth, gave haunting evidence of the thousands of Christians who had betrayed their Lord by stepping on it.

The fumi-e obsessed Endo. *Would I have stepped on it?* he wondered. *What did those people feel as they apostatized? Who were they?* History books at his Catholic school recorded only the brave, glorious martyrs, not the cowards who forsook the faith. The traitors were twice damned: first by the silence of God at the time of torture and later by the silence of history. Instead of writing his intended novel, Endo began work on *Silence*, which tells the story of the apostates of the seventeenth century.

Shusaku Endo went on to become Japan's best-known writer, his name making the short list for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Graham Greene called him "one of the finest living novelists," and luminaries like John Updike joined the chorus of praise. Remarkably, in a nation where Christians comprise less than one percent of the population, Endo's major books, all centering on Christian themes, landed on Japan's bestseller lists. Now a major motion picture directed by Martin Scorsese will bring *Silence*, his most powerful story, to a worldwide audience.

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Only Mako Fujimura could have written this book. Bicultural in upbringing and sensibility, he understands the nuances of Japan, and his knowledge of the language sheds light on Endo's original source material. At the same time, Mako's years of living in New York have given him a contemporary, global perspective. On that visit to Nagasaki, he could not help reliving another ground zero experience, for on September 11, 2001, Mako was working in his studio a few blocks from the World Trade Center. And on the very day he stood on Martyrs Hill, news outlets were featuring photos of two Japanese journalists kneeling before

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Fujimura, painter Bruce  
Herman, Duke  
theologian/ pianist Jeremy  
Begbie and Yale composer  
Christopher Theofanidis,  
based on T. S. Eliot's *Four  
Quartets*.

A popular speaker, Fujimura has lectured at numerous conferences, universities and museums, including the Aspen Institute, Yale and Princeton Universities, Sato Museum and the Phoenix Art Museum. Among many awards and recognitions, Bucknell University honored him with the Outstanding Alumni Award in 2012, and the American Academy of Religion named him as its 2014 Religion and the Arts award recipient. He has received honorary doctorates from Belhaven University, Biola University, Cairn University and Roanoke College.

sword-wielding jihadists, shortly before their executions. One of the two, Kenji Goto, was an outspoken Christian. Though the perpetrators may change, the age of religious martyrdom endures.

Informed by both East and West, Mako guides the reader on excursions into Japanese art, samurai rituals, the tea ceremony and Asian theology, even while relying on Western mentors such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, J. S. Bach, Vincent van Gogh and J. R. R. Tolkien. Much like Shusaku Endo, Mako feels caught between two worlds, conversant with both, though not fully at home in either.

In *Silence and Beauty*, Mako is not so much presenting a thesis as he is following the strands of Endo's writing that intimately engage him. From his experience as an academic, an artist and especially as a Japanese American Christian, Mako identifies with the sense of an "alien" identity that plagued Shusaku Endo all his life. Endo traveled to France for university training, one of the first Japanese to do so after World War II. He encountered racism and rejection, yet returned from Europe to his own country feeling a stranger there as well. Mako made a similar journey, only in reverse.

Born in Boston to Japanese parents, Mako became the first nonnative to study in a prestigious school of painting in Japan that dates back to the fifteenth century. While earning a doctorate he learned the ancient Nihonga technique that relies on natural pigments derived from stone-ground minerals and from cured oyster, clam and scallop shells. Rather than painting traditional subjects such as kimonos and cherry blossoms, Fujimura applied the Nihonga style to his preferred modern medium of abstract expressionism.

Mako's paintings now hang in major museums in Japan, Europe and the United States, and his work commands respect and high prices. Tokyo honored him with a career retrospective before he turned forty, and as a presidential appointee to the National Council on the Arts he served as an American ambassador for the arts. A thoughtful Christian, he also founded the International Arts Movement to help nurture artists, and in 2014 received the Religion and the Arts Award from the American Academy of Religion. Recently he accepted an appointment to direct the Brehm Center at Fuller Seminary, thus splitting his time between studios in Pasadena and Princeton.

The core identities of an artist and a Christian create an ongoing tension. As Mako explains,

I have noticed, as an artist with a Christian faith, that if we are explicit about your faith in the public sphere – if we even mention our commitment to live a Christian life – we are dismissed right away in the art world. I have been told by influential critics that if I was not so explicit about my Christian identity, I would have had a far more mainstream career. The worst thing you can do in promoting his or her art career is to be public about how faith motivates their art. To invoke the



# BOOK EXCERPT

transgressive, the cynical, the elusive may be the only way to become a respected artist; needy, shock-filled, ironical work gets attention as “serious.”

Mako believes that art can heal as well as disturb, and in contrast to some modern artists he refuses to abandon the ideal of beauty. To a single work he may apply as many as a hundred layers of paint, ground by hand from such substances as gold, silver, platinum, cinnabar and malachite. He approaches Shusaku Endo’s work in a similar fashion, probing among the multiple layers of *Silence* and other novels to uncover three main themes: hiddenness, ambiguity and beauty.

\* \* \* \*

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*Hiddenness.* Partly because of isolation and partly because of the periodic outbreaks of persecution, Japanese learned to bury their most treasured thoughts and emotions. Ask any Japanese the difference between *honne*, what takes place on the inside, and *tatemae*, what others see on the outside, and they will nod knowingly. Ask any American, for that matter, or any European or African. We all “put on a face” for the outside world, concealing our innermost selves.

By dwelling on acts of betrayal, Endo exposes the fault lines that every person lives with and seeks to hide. In the process he shines new light on the Christian faith – at once a harsh light that bares hypocrisy and also a soft light that dispels the shadows of guilt. From his time in the West, Endo had gained an openness to individualism, doubt and self-reflection – so different from the emphasis on conformity, ritual and repressed emotions that he knew from Japan.

Reading Shusaku Endo’s work, I am reminded of Søren Kierkegaard: a misfit, haunted by his past, struggling with parent issues and unfulfilled desires. Endo’s novels speak to the inner person, where lie buried the feelings of shame and rejection that the average Japanese must mask in a culture that exalts appropriate and proper behavior. A Japanese businessman may have a secret life – extramarital affairs, sexual perversions, domestic violence, drunkenness – while carrying on a perfectly respectable life in public.

Apostates may step on the fumi-e in public, but what goes on internally? Not just apostates but all of us: How do we deal with the dissonance of betraying the One who died for us? Americans, known for individuality, have our own culture of conformity – to fashion and consumer goods, to educational and career success – and likewise bury shameful secrets in unseen corners of the self.

*Ambiguity.* Visitors to Japan come away impressed by the politeness they encounter. When the plane taxis up to the gate, baggage handlers and cleaners all bow in greeting. At the hotel, bellhops rush to carry your suitcase, then politely decline all tips. You pull into a service station and white-gloved attendants, often women, surround your car to fill it with gasoline and wash your windows and headlights. When you leave, they bow deeply and



wave goodbye as if you have done them a great favor by allowing them to serve you. You hear few car horns even in a congested city, as drivers patiently take turns at intersections.

Then you read an account of the Bataan Death March or see a movie like *Unbroken*, and you walk out aghast at the unmitigated cruelty of the Japanese. My uncle, who served with the American occupation force in Japan, told me that he and his fellow soldiers expected ambushes from snipers around every corner. Instead, the nation that had launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and had flouted the Geneva Convention in their treatment of POWs turned subservient overnight, in obedience to their emperor's command.

Japan absorbed the only two atomic weapons ever used in war, and fire-bombing destroyed the majority of buildings in other cities. War, tsunamis, earthquakes, nuclear reactor meltdown, economic collapse – Japan has shown an almost superhuman ability to respond to catastrophe with equanimity. After the 2011 tsunami, Japanese survivors stood without complaint in long lines to be served rice and to get assigned a sleeping mat on the floor of a gymnasium.

*“Mako’s autobiographical insertions point the way toward transparency and healing. Like Endo, he is a cultural stepchild vulnerable to rejection and misunderstanding by either side. He writes openly of depression and despair, and the allure of suicide. Beauty and death, honor and shame, pain and stoicism, ritualism and disbelief – Mako has lived with these ambiguous Japanese pairings and he helps Endo’s readers untangle them.”*

The pressure of social conformity produces this kind of response. A Japanese person dare not bring shame on the community by misbehaving, by responding like the Americans who may protest or even riot after a natural disaster destroys their neighborhood or cuts off power and water supplies. As psychology has taught us, though, pain repressed does not go away. It leaks out: in alcoholism, in Japan’s high suicide rate, in the rare but shockingly brutal crime.

Mako points to the oddness of Shusaku Endo’s characters as a way of lancing the cultural ambiguity. “In the New Testament of the Bible, in the Gospel of John 8:32, Jesus says, ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ [Flannery] O’Connor added her inimitable twist: ‘You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.’ In Japan, such oddness is perceived as threatening the entire society.” Yet therein may lie the path to honesty and inner health, a way of loosening the bonds of denial.

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Endo’s unique gift was in identifying the wounds of the Japanese soul and exposing the air that Japanese are breathing in; it was as though he had a therapeutic and clinical purpose in his identification of the deep trauma that is a constant invisible companion to the Japanese. His illnesses and many failures in life had stirred him to empathy, and by depicting the raw anguish



of the Japanese past, he was indeed defining a Japanese perspective, and beauty, toward suffering.

*Beauty.* Japan savors beauty. The humblest hostess serves tea in delicate china cups, never Styrofoam or plastic, and fresh flowers usually grace the table. Some Japanese homemakers spend an hour each morning preparing bento lunch boxes for their schoolchildren, arranging the portions of seafood, rice, meat and vegetables in colorful patterns to resemble cartoon characters, animals or famous monuments. A Japanese homeowner fortunate enough to have a yard usually finds a place for a tiny garden or goldfish pond. And Christmas cards from Japan, which often feature pop-up flowers or kimono designs, are exquisite works of art.

*“In Japan’s reverence for beauty Mako sees a reflection of God, for beauty mirrors God’s own self.”*

In Japan’s reverence for beauty Mako sees a reflection of God, for beauty mirrors God’s own self. The New Testament book of James declares that “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” Mako adds, “It is my conviction that God expresses his great love through Japanese beauty, just as refractive light permeates the broken, prismatic surface of Nihonga paintings.” The delicate aesthetics of Japan, a form of common grace, fed Mako’s own growth as a Christian and enrich his work now.

According to Flaubert, the artist inhabits his or her work as God does: present everywhere, but visible nowhere. Endo helps to identify signs of that presence, working (in Mako’s words) as a kind of archaeologist, “scooping up the elements of broken shards of the culture of Christianity in Japan.” Much of the essential humanity and beauty in Japan traces back to the era of failed faith. Godlikeness – compassion, joy, love – refracts qualities of God whether they are recognized as such or not. Mako proposes that Japan is a Christ-hidden culture, haunted by a past that has left indelible historical marks, like the blackened footprints on the wooden frame of a fumi-e.

Mako uses an analogy from art classes to suggest the imprint of Christianity on Japan: in design, open space or “negative space,” surrounds the “positive space” of the central, highlighted object. A skilled artist knows that negative space, though in the background, makes a subtle but indispensable contribution to the overall effect. Mako sees in contemporary Japan a background laid down by the Christianity that its ancestors rejected. “So while the Tokugawa era successfully purged Christians from Japan, an unanticipated outcome was that in banning Christianity, they created an imprint of it, a ‘negative space’ within culture. In a culture that honors the hidden, the weak and the unspoken, Christianity became a hidden reality of Japanese culture.” Cultural values long suppressed may manifest years later.

Painting in the Nihonga style, Mako must anticipate how the minerals will change over time, for his paintings will look very different in fifty years or a hundred. Silver tarnishes to



charcoal black; copper oxidizes to green. Hiddenness, ambiguity, beauty: the three themes he identifies in Endo's writings also pervade his own paintings. The product of long, painstaking work gets hidden beneath scores of layers and may remain hidden for years, or even forever. Mako's style, like that of all modern art, evokes a response of ambiguity, with no precise "message" to each viewer. Yet beauty emerges – rooted in tradition, yes, while also set free.

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Shusaku Endo described Japan as a swampland for Christianity, and missionaries who have served there tend to agree. Other Asian countries have seen explosive growth – the megachurches of the Philippines and South Korea, the massive unregistered church in China – while in Japan, the average church numbers less than thirty. A nation that copies nearly everything Western, from management practices to McDonald's, baseball and pop music, curiously avoids religion. Most puzzling, as Mako mentions, is that so many values in the culture already reflect the way of the New Testament. Why, then, do so few Japanese convert?

That question troubled Shusaku Endo too, who ultimately concluded that the failure stemmed from the Western emphasis on God's fatherhood. Mother love tends to be unconditional, accepting the child no matter what, regardless of behavior. Father love tends to be more provisional, bestowing approval as the child measures up to certain standards of behavior. According to Endo, Japan, a nation of authoritarian fathers, has understood the father love of God but not the mother love.

On my trips to Japan I have heard accounts of authoritarian fathers who never apologize, who remain emotionally distant, who show nothing resembling love or grace, who offer criticism but little encouragement. One woman told me that, at the age of thirteen, she had actually plotted to kill her father after he sexually abused her.

For Christianity to have any appeal to the Japanese, Endo suggests, it must stress instead the mother love of God, the love that forgives wrongs and binds wounds and draws, rather than forces, others to itself. ("Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!") "In 'maternal religion' Christ comes to prostitutes, worthless people, misshapen people and forgives them," says Endo. As he sees it, Jesus brought the message of mother love to balance the father love of the Old Testament. A mother's love will not desert even a child who commits a crime. Endo mentions the transformation of the disciples once they realized that Christ still loved them even after they had betrayed him. To be proven wrong was nothing new; to be proven treacherously wrong and still loved – that was new and radical.

This insight helps answer a common question about *Silence*: Why did Endo express his own





deeply felt faith through a story of betrayal? When *Silence* first appeared, in 1966, many Japanese Catholics responded with outrage. Protective of their martyred forebears, they objected to the romanticization of apostates. How easily we forget that the church was founded by disciples who also betrayed their Master. At his moment of greatest need, Jesus' disciples fled in the darkness. The boldest of the lot, Peter, was the very one who cursed and denied him three times before the cock crowed. It was for traitors that Jesus died.

Endo explains that he centers his work on the experiences of failure and shame because these leave the most lasting impact on a person's life. Jesus' most poignant legacy was his undying love, even for – *especially* for – those who betrayed him. When Judas led a lynch mob into the garden, Jesus addressed him as "friend." On Calvary, while stretched out naked in the posture of ultimate disgrace, Jesus roused himself to cry out for his tormentors, "Father, forgive them." To those scandalized by the apparent apostasy of his characters Ferreira and Rodrigues, Endo points to the two great founders of the Christian church: Peter denied Christ three times, Paul led the first persecution of Christians.

The entire Bible can be seen, in fact, as a story of betrayal, beginning with Adam and proceeding through the history of the Israelites, culminating in the cross. In an astonishing reversal the Romans' cruelest execution device became the ubiquitous Christian symbol. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself," Jesus had predicted. John adds by way of explanation, "He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." At the cross, hiddenness, ambiguity and strange beauty converge.

Every one of Jesus' followers, from the first disciples down through history to the present day, knows the feeling of betrayal. Sharp-edged gossip, the stab of envy, that colleague we humiliated, the racist comment that drew a laugh, a sudden and inexplicable cruelty, apologies to our children deserved but never made, a furtive fantasy, a stolen kiss, callousness toward another's misery, an addiction to what demeans or even destroys – in ways small and large we too step on the fumi-e. Our only hope is the forgiving gaze of the betrayed Savior, the still point of Endo's novel.

And now Martin Scorsese, director of movies such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, has in his old age chosen this picture of Christ as his subject. When Mako Fujimura spoke on silence and beauty at Hiroshima City University, a professor who stands as one of Japan's greatest painters, commented, "Fumi-e is the best portrait of Christ I've ever seen."