CHAPTER FOUR

ENDO’S IMAGE OF CHRIST


*Silence, Mother, and The Samurai* are chosen for this chapter as my main sources for investigating how Endo develops the image of Christ in literary form. These works exemplify Endo’s images of Christ for a Japanese religio-cultural background. The chapter concludes with a three-fold analysis of a ‘Christ for Japan’: 1) a theological perspective, 2) a perspective from the viewpoint of the religious and cultural heritage, 3) a classification according to inculturation typologies.

**Contents and Inculturation Perspectives**

I begin by presenting my main material on the image of Christ in the early development of Endo’s literature. Here I will focus on issues which I consider important for a further analysis of his understanding of Christ.

*Silence (1966)*

You may trample. Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on my face on the plaque. But the pain alone is enough. I understand your pain and your suffering, and I shall share it. It is for that reason that I am here… I was not silent. I suffered beside you. [Endo 1966/97: 241]

*Silence* was published 13 years after Endo returned from studying abroad.¹ The narrative is based on factual history, the most intense

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¹ For two years from 1960–1962, after returning from studying abroad, Endo was hospitalized and had three dangerous operations. Endo faced death and feelings of fear and isolation. This was a crucial time in his career as a Catholic writer and marked the beginning of his second stage. Endo claimed: “If I had not had those years in hospital, *Silence* would not have matured in me”. Miyoshi and Endo 1973: 10–29.
persecution of Christians from 1614 to 1640 in Japan. A zealous Jesuit missionary smuggles himself into Japan during the period, hides with Japanese Christians, is betrayed, captured, forced to endure torture, challenged by the religio-cultural heritage of the country, and finally recants his faith. This is the story of people in endless suffering, and God’s apparent silence in the face of it. Silence contains various themes and many theological issues related to missions. Readers are exposed to different attributes of faith and become aware of many unsolvable questions. The author does not conclude by stating what is right or wrong, so readers are drawn into considerable ethical and spiritual dilemmas. They are invited to step into the historical situation and to reflect upon complex questions. We, the readers, are responsible for considering the protagonist’s questions and pursuing the answers. In Silence, Endo poses many theological questions concerning the inculturation of Christianity, to which he develops answers in his later works. The questions he raises indicate his implicit theology. They are presented through four protagonists—Kichijiro, Ferreira, Inoue, and Rodrigues. I shall discuss the issues expressed by them in the next subsection.

Introducing the Main Protagonists in Silence

The poor in faith
Kichijiro is a Japanese man who smuggled Fr. Rodrigues into Japan during the period of isolation. He then betrays Rodrigues by informing the authorities about him. He represents a cowardly and weak human being who does not have the strength to fight for his family, friend, himself, nor for his faith. The issue of his faith, however, is anything but straightforward. He denies his faith but comes back for pardoning. His attitude is particularly illustrated by a lack of endurance; he often

During the years of hospitalization, Endo must have had a religious conversion and this is expressed in Silence (1966). As preparation for Silence, Endo had written Unzen, and Going Home. See Endo 1967(c).

2 See Chapter 2 for the history of Kakure Kirishitans. The story is set in the early years of Japan’s seclusion. It is said that some 5–6000 Christians were tortured for their faith during this period. Cf. Gonoi 1990: 238–240.

3 Silence can be read not only as Japanese religious history but also as a universal story of people of all times, striving in agony and pain for freedom and justice. It is worth mentioning that Endo originally entitled the novel as The Sunny Spot. His main concern was to depict the companionship of God in silence, and the pain of God in silence.