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Das, Rupen. Review of *Silence*, by Shusaku Endo. *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 65-66.

Shusaku Endo, *Silence* (London: Marylebone House, 2016), 304 pages. ISBN: 978-1910674277.

Having lived and worked in the Middle East at a time when the Christian community and churches were being targeted by Islamic State and other radical groups, Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* provided a very timely foil for me for the disturbing question of where God is in the midst of the suffering of His people. For those involved in Christian mission *Silence* should be required reading, because it moves the discussions from the heroic pronouncements of 'reaching the world for Christ' while enjoying the benefits of Constantinian Christianity in the West, to the reality of evil and suffering in parts of the world that have been historically resistant to the Gospel. Rather than repeating the narrative, and thus spoiling the reading of the novel, I will instead highlight one specific issue the book raises, which is central to missions in countries with a high risk of persecution.

Rarely has the moral responsibility of the missionary and the mission agency towards the nationals they convert been discussed. In countries where persecution is real, what is the moral responsibility of the foreigner missionary when nationals who have come to faith in Christ are persecuted? Endo does not shy away from this question as he portrays the spiritual and mental turmoil of one of the Italian priests who is forced to watch Japanese Christians being tortured and killed. Somehow the persecutors understood the psychology of the missionaries who saw themselves as heroic figures who were even willing to become martyrs for the faith. They also understood that they could inflict unbearable torment on the missionary if the people they had shepherded were tortured in front of their eyes. The torment would be enough for them to leave the mission field, to renounce their faith, or to doubt their calling as priests.

Interwoven with this question is the personal response of missionaries in the face of persecution. How much physical and mental suffering is tolerable before one betrays Christ? Is the act of stepping on the image of Christ in a painting an act of betrayal? Is there redemption after betrayal – would God have forgiven and restored Judas if he had repented, as He did Peter?

As a good novelist, Endo portrays the reality of life and does not seek to tie up all the loose ends by the end of the narrative. So, what about the silence of God that persecuted Christians encounter in the midst of the horrors of torture and death? In *Silence* God speaks, 'I was not silent. I suffered beside you'. This is a mystery that can only be understood by those who have experienced suffering when God was seemingly silent. Endo has managed to communicate a theology about God, human suffering, personal responsibility, and faith that few books of theology have been able to.

Reviewed by Rupen Das