

SILENCE AND BEAUTY

沈黙と美

Reflections

A companion guide
for introspection and discussion
on Mako Fujimura's book and video series

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
<small>A companion to video 1</small>	
Fumi-e	7
<small>A companion to video 2</small>	
Outsider vs. Insider	10
<small>A companion to video 3</small>	
The Voice of God Through Silence	14
<small>A companion to video 4</small>	
The Third Way	17
<small>A companion to video 5</small>	
Silence and Beauty Examined	20
<small>A companion to video 6</small>	
Silence	23
<small>Discussion guide based on the novel by Shusaku Endo</small>	

INTRODUCTION

A companion to video 1

Born in Boston to Japanese parents, Mako Fujimura became the first nonnative to study in a prestigious school of painting in Japan that dates back to the fifteenth century. Throughout the process of completing Tokyo University of the Art's doctoral-level lineage program 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.

—from Silence and Beauty: Hidden Faith Born of Suffering

Mako Fujimura, in his book *Silence and Beauty*, vividly reflects on his personal journey into Shusaku Endo's *Silence*. By his chapter title of the same name, "A Journey Into Silence," the curious subtitle reads:

Pulverization.

Mako goes on to say,

I entered the darkly lit exhibit room alone.

The studio given to me as a National Scholar was a few blocks away from the Tokyo National Museum at Tokyo University of the Arts. In between painting layers I often wandered into the museum, an imposing building with a Western façade and a Japanese roof, reflective of the nineteenth-century Meiji restoration period combining the Japanese past with influences of the West in what is called the Imperial Crown Style. I was studying the Tokyo National Museum's collections of Rinpa (seventeenth-century) and nihonga byōbu screens. After spending time in the main hall where these majestic pieces were exhibited, I entered one of the smaller exhibits to one side. The display cases were full of what seemed like tablets laid flat. I read the description and learned that these were from seventeenth-century Japan, a collection of fumi-e (literally "stepping blocks" pronounced FOOM-e-yay).

Fumi-e were created during the seventeenth-century Tokugawa shogunate Christian persecution. They are images of Jesus, or of the Virgin with a child, carved on wood or cast in bronze. Villagers were asked to line up on the beach and one by one renounce Christianity by stepping on these blocks. Later on, it was the custom of the New Year's celebration, with villagers lining up to pay tributes to the temple and, for those suspected, to step on the fumi-e. Individuals who refused or even hesitated were arrested and most likely jailed and tortured.

I had just come to embrace faith in Christ at the age of twenty-seven, after several years of spiritual awakening. Now I faced, literally, the reality of Christian faith in Japan. I had just been baptized in a missionary church in Higashikurume, but this fumi-e encounter was my true "baptism" into being a Christian in Japan.

What haunted me, and continues to haunt me to this day, is that all of the fumi-e images were worn smooth. The cast or carved images were hardly recognizable due to so many people walking over them. The image of Christ, hidden beneath the smooth surface of the fumi-e, serves as an emblem of Japanese faith to this day. And the worn surface of fumi-e also captures Japanese beauty enduring trauma.

With the backdrop of the chaotic world in which we are living Mako invites us to join him on a profound journey to make sense of what appears to not make sense—the silence of God—through insights encountered in his book, a series of introspective video shorts, a close look at his art and art form, and a deep dive into Endo’s *Silence*.

There is so much profundity and insight in these works that no study guide could thoroughly unpack the fullness. Indeed, no academic analysis can exhaust such depths. Yet, there are several enduring themes—heretofore not commonly explored—that will benefit all who have eyes to see and patience to seek and embrace the hiddenness, ambiguity, and beauty found in the silence and suffering of our lives.

If you are so bold as to explore the breadth and depth of these subjects—subjects that pervade the human experience—through this unique lens, it first warrants understanding the lens that frames and colors our current understanding of silence, trauma, and the Ground Zero moments we experience.

Trauma and suffering are common to the human experience. Though common, Ground Zero experiences (defined as a symbolic center of a shift in awareness due to devastating tragedy that leads to lament) are very personal and certainly life altering. Common, too, is the silence that is perceived during these periods of suffering and devastation.

For further introspection and discussion ...

1. During times of suffering in your life—which, for some reading this, may be palpable even now—how would you characterize your suffering? List several words here:

2. It has been said that Endo's writing is about what it means to live in "the Saturday," the day of abandonment, wondering if there is going to be an Easter. How would you describe your response in the midst of suffering and waiting?

3. Are the words that come to mind during the difficult seasons of your life more often used in positive or negative contexts? Think about a time in your life when you have walked by faith and not by sight. How did you respond to the silence?

4. Mako's ancient Japanese art form, nihonga, utilizes a pulverized blend of minerals. The beauty of Mako's art is made possible in part because of the pulverization and layering of these materials. While it may be easier to see the beautiful effects of pulverization, or the value of what comes of our suffering, do you see value and beauty in the pulverization of your life in the midst of suffering? Is there value in the ambiguity and hiddenness of the "negative space" in your life?

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FUMI-E

A companion to video 2

We celebrate martyrs. Their actions not only follow what they profess, their martyrdom speaks louder than words and with enduring volume. Martyrs are willing to sacrifice it all, exemplifying their devotion amidst unspeakable circumstances, affording them a venerable place in history.

Yet acts of betrayal plague even the most faithful. In Endo's book, *Silence*, we see a powerful story unfold that orients itself around the trampling of the fumi-e; the image of Christ and the Virgin Mary. These scenes represent 250 years of Christian oppression and betrayal at the hand of Japanese dictatorships.

While betrayal is certainly not something to celebrate—whether it be our betrayal of a friend, those who have betrayed us, or the betrayal of our Creator—neither is it helpful to celebrate this ideal without recognizing the pattern of failures and betrayals that plague those who have been martyred for their faith.

In *Silence and Beauty*, Mako expounds:

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.

The Gospel of Luke 22:59-62 describes the moment of the Apostle Peter's last of three infamous denials of Christ during Christ's suffering leading up to the crucifixion:

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Mako provides encouragement for such moments of our own betrayals and failures. He recounts from *Silence*:

Kichijiro will experience Peter-like repentance instead of Judas-like remorse. The transformation of Kichijiro, which may escape the notice of all but the most careful reader, comes through the sacrifice of Father Rodrigues's own attachment to his Western faith. In that searing vision of grace, Endo injects hope through weakness, a uniquely Japanese concept, back into the world.

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.

For further introspection and discussion...

1. What is your personal experience related to betrayal? How have you handled that Judas figure in your life? How do you respond when you are the Judas figure with respect to Christ, to family, and to work-related relationships?
2. What are your personal fumi-es? Does the concept of fumi-e help you to break the cycle of intractable sin or addictive behaviors? What new habits or spiritual practices might make sense to implement as a result of this study?

3. What in our own faith are we willing to trample in order to fit into the prevailing culture? Should we feel comfortable externally trampling on the fumi-e even if we internally respect it? Do you think making a regular practice of such subversion leads to a stronger, weaker, or wiser faith?

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OUTSIDER vs. INSIDER

A companion to video 3

The smooth worn surface of fumi-e is a mirror reflecting the Japanese soul and culture. The trauma of that past lives on, often unacknowledged, in the suppression of an individual's identity to the values and commitments of the group or society. One of Mako's central insights in *Silence and Beauty* is that seventeenth-century fumi-e, originally a psychological device of torture and religious persecution, gave birth to conformist fumi-e culture—a culture that forces individuals to surrender their most treasured identity.

But what does a fumi-e culture mean in practice? It means a culture of groupthink, a culture that bullies those who don't fit into submission. There is a revealing adage that encapsulates this point, "the nail that sticks out will be hammered down."

In fumi-e culture it is important to designate insiders from outsiders, native ideas and religions from foreign influences. Mako explains that of Japan's two phonetic alphabets, katakana was created to identify foreign people and objects such as a piano or a television. Foreign words are always written in katakana rather than in kanji...

What does it mean for us to embrace outsiders? What wisdom can we draw from Endo, the *Silence* story, and Mako's *Silence and Beauty*?

In *Silence and Beauty*, Mako shows that those who survive such intimidation are those who hold their individual convictions close to their chests, never revealing them at all—or who never develop any convictions in the first place. Therefore, by the time a typical Japanese reaches middle school she or he will be well trained to suppress individual thought. This child will even suppress labeling an abuse as such. Her or his stoicism will be honored. Any creative gesture will be seen as a threat to the whole.

Silence is not merely a novel about persecution of a religious minority in seventeenth-century Japan. It is ultimately about the cycle of communal entrapment repeated over and over again throughout history and is seen in families, business culture, and schoolyards throughout the world.

In this sense, then, Jesus is a misfit, an exile in the world, who bears that true identity as an outsider for our sakes. To the Japanese mind, relates Mako, *“Jesus is the ultimate misfit, an outsider whose birthright was to be a true insider.”*

Isaiah 53:1-9 describes the Messiah, whom Christians identify as Jesus of Nazareth and whom the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day classified as a misfit. The Messiah is depicted below as an outsider whose birthright was to be a true insider:

- 1 Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
- 4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
- 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
- 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
-

As an exile in his own culture [Endo] had a unique lens, an ability to objectively observe Japanese culture. As an exile in foreign cultures he was also given a unique lens, an ability to observe other cultures with objectivity.... Perhaps more than any other postwar writer of his generation, Endo had the capacity to live inside the "other" with empathy—as Atticus Finch of To Kill a Mockingbird would have it, "to climb into someone's skin and walk around in it."

For further introspection and discussion...

1. Mako makes the point that artists are outsiders because they sense the disappearance of margins and cultural estuaries where they can be free to explore the relationship between the ambiguous and the beautiful. Whether you are an artist or not, how can you cultivate a degree of detachment from your milieu to attain a more objective perspective on the world around you? Do you think this is important? How might it serve missional Christianity?
2. A concern that comes out as we journey into the writing of Endo is the question of our own tribal boundaries and the language we use unconsciously. This could be family traditions or it could be nationality, the

ethos of the town we grew up in or the school we attended. All of these things create boundaries and can define how we relate to the world and how our identity and loves are shaped. How do these “loyalties” play into our perception and judgments about the other? How do we see the outsider? How do we define other people?

3. Reflect for a few moments about fumi-e culture as it relates to your workplace, place of worship, or family dynamics. How does the outsider/insider dichotomy play out in these arenas? Do the communities in which you spend the most time have a desire “to climb into someone’s skin and walk around in it?”

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THE VOICE OF GOD THROUGH SILENCE

A companion to video 4

The breakthrough idea of *Silence and Beauty* is that beauty and sacrifice are inextricably tied together. This connection is developed in a myriad of ways but, for Endo and for Mako, beauty came out of the refinement of culture that preceded the period of darkness in Japan. The beauty of Japan is tied to the nation's dark, hidden journeys. But the universal message of Endo's *Silence* and Mako's *Silence and Beauty* is that beauty is also tied to the darkness, trauma, betrayals, feelings of abandonment, and spiritual deserts that we all experience. Beauty is the missing part of the Gospel, particularly the beauty of God's mysterious stillness and peace, as people of faith have wrestled with the problems of evil, sin, and death.

Mako's contribution to this discussion is to show that beauty, though often radiant, illuminates the silence much like the moon lights up the night sky. Hidden beauty mirrors God's own self, and beauty gives voice through the eye of the mind to the mysteries of the Divine whisper.

In Silence and Beauty, Mako observes that "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."

That hidden trauma, concealed deep within the Japanese psyche became encapsulated for Endo in the footprints in the wooden frames of a fumi-e. Japan is a country haunted by Christ, and experiences its own set of “cross pressures” that philosopher Charles Taylor has made more comprehensible in his momentous work on secularism.

“Japan is still a Christ-hidden culture, haunted by the past, with a developed sense of hiding well what is most important. Endo, an archaeologist of cultural trauma, begins to dip into the mud, scooping up the elements of broken shards of the culture of Christianity in Japan, and discovers, in my mind, the essential humanity and beauty of Japan.”

Is there anything more thrilling and awe-inspiring than the calm before the crashing of the storm, or the strange quiet that seems to fall upon nature before some supernatural phenomenon or disastrous upheaval? And is there anything that can touch our hearts like the power of stillness and silence?

As L.B. Cowman, the author of *Streams in the Desert*, relates in a meditation on the Scripture passage “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10):

For the hearts that will cease focusing on themselves, there is “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding” (Phil. 4:7); “quietness and trust” (Isa. 30:15), which is the source of all strength; a “great peace” that will never “make them stumble” (Ps. 119:165); and a deep rest, which the world can never give nor take away. Deep within the center of the soul is a chamber of peace where God lives and where, if we will enter it and quiet all the other sounds, we can hear his “gentle whisper.” (1 Kings 19:12).

There is only one way to know God: “Be still, and know.” “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Hab. 2:20).

Cowman, Endo, and Mako all understand the power of hidden faith born of suffering and silence.

*“One of the paradoxes of Japanese culture,” explains Mako in *Silence and Beauty*, “is its focus on an overlap of sacrifice with natural beauty: decay with permanence, death with life. This aesthetic link between beauty and sacrifice may be one reason that the Japanese could plumb the Christian gospel’s narrative of sacrifice and redemption, even very early in their history.”*

In order to get to a place of healing, Endo's journey begins by describing the "muddy" soil of Japan, which seems inhospitable to Christianity but upon closer inspection tells quite a different story.

For further introspection and discussion...

1. Endo complained many times in lectures that people mistook his book to be about the silence of God, when in reality it was about the voice of God speaking through silence. This misunderstanding encourages us to pause and reflect on the question: What, ultimately, is the message of Endo's novel *Silence*? Is it about the nihilism of God's voice becoming silent in the twentieth century? Is it about us unable to hear God in suffering and trauma? Or is it something else?
2. So, if *Silence* encourages the reader to look deeply into his or her own experiences of exile, trauma, persecution, how does one do this imaginatively? Has anyone done this before and, if so, what can be learned from it?
3. What are some practical ways that the spiritual disciplines of stillness and silence can be learned and incorporated into your daily life? Are you aware of ways that your soul is haunted by Christ? Does this "cross pressure" point back to pain or trauma that you may or may not have dealt with? Has beauty or mystery played any role in vaccinating you against cynicism, nihilism, or despair?

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THE THIRD WAY

A companion to video 5

Before Endo named his novel Silence, he considered another title. His original title was Hinata no Nioi, which can be translated as “The Aroma of the Sunshine” or “The Scent of the Sunshine.” His publisher balked ... Endo later complained ... “I did not write a book about the silence of God; I wrote a book about the Voice of God speaking through suffering and silence.”

Where are these moments when we feel discouraged, when we feel there is no other way than to do this very thing that I don't want to do? Or, at least believe that there is no way out of this situation? And to that I think Endo says through his writings and his life actually, that even though the world and the modern world in particular has preconditioned us to believe that resources are limited, how options are perhaps only this or that, there is always a third way. Once you know what your limitations are and what you perhaps are told that are your only options, can we find that third way by activating imaginative faith into this third way?

Mako illuminates the significance of human imagination amidst the suffering and silence:

Human imagination can create beauty or weapons; it can improve and destroy our lives at the same time. The arts train our imagination toward restoration and reconciliation, but the arts can also cause us to lose hope; we can become persuaded that the only path is to live trapped within despair.

A Christian who lacks imagination strikes Endo as a terrible ambassador of faith... because an unimaginative perspective limits one's faith in the mystery of God.

Mako provides additional insight as he introduces the concept of an estuary—that delicate and crucial intersection where complex ecosystems thrive. He suggests that cultural estuaries can foster the human imagination, but all too often:

I have encountered many Christians who make black-and-white judgments about others, especially in regard to failures of faith. We have a culture of judgmental reflection within the church, the we-versus-them duality, a culture in which any violation of behavioral codes is seen to be the only aspect of a faith journey to be examined.... [Church] leadership decisions, often disguised as "protecting the sheep," at times turn out to be uncaring judgments that do not value mystery and that lack patience with the person's ability to grow and change.

In contrast, the Apostle Paul speaks of being the aroma of Christ through silence and suffering:

We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

To Endo, the aroma of the sun pointed to Christ.

Twenty-six men and three children were paraded some 480 miles from Kyoto to this hill to be crucified. It was the magistrates' logic that it would embarrass them to be taunted throughout their journey. Some bled as they walked; their ears or noses had been cut off in Kyoto. ... The story of their arrival at their destination is one of a remarkable display of faith. When they arrived at the hill in Nagasaki, crosses were already lined up. As the story goes, one of the two boys said, "Show me my cross." Then the other echoed, "Show me mine."

For further introspection and discussion...

1. Endo describes life's Ground Zero moments as "toxic aromas." In the midst of the stench and darkness of our own Ground Zero moments, how can we be aromas of sunshine? What do we need to do differently in order to send off a different aroma?
2. In exploring the denial of faith, and faith that is hidden from the overwhelming pressure of culture, Endo opened up a path to probe the mystery of existence. In what ways do you hide or deny your faith today? Are you bothered by that?
3. The ultimate question that any of us, or any art, can ask is this: "How may I die generously?" What does that look like for you?
4. Mako likens Endo's writing to the metallic "third color" of silver, which tarnishes to deep charcoal black when exposed to air. As tarnished silver Endo's writings overlap with the Japanese aesthetic of Sen no Rikyu, a significant historic influencer of all of Japanese aesthetics. Mako thinks Endo's words deepen over time with the increased exposure to the air of trauma. How has your faith deepened over time because of the difficult times in your life? How has it weakened? Do you carry around the weight of formerly trampled fumi-es?

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SILENCE AND BEAUTY EXAMINED

A companion to video 6

In reflecting on his years growing up in the beauty-filled Japanese city of Kamakura, Mako has remarked that very few Japanese, even knowing something about the book *Silence*, would be prompted to meditate too deeply on their own land's history of anguish and death. "Our earth hides the blood of the past. I certainly did not think of such things as a child," says Mako.

But Kamakura, nestled between small mountains facing a cove, is for Mako the very embodiment of a cultural estuary. Kamakura, like Japan's other ancient cities of Nara and Kyoto, was once a cultural endpoint of the Silk Road. As merchants imported silk and other goods from the Middle East, India, China, and Korea to Japan, they also imported many cultural and religious forms. And so, over time Kamakura became a depository of all those cultures. "I call this infusion of various cultures a 'cultural estuary'; it creates diversity and refinement, and in my early childhood I was immersed in it," recounts Mako.

No one would have ever imagined that Mako, growing up in Kamakura in the shadow of the Great Buddha, would eventually turn toward the discovery of faith in Christ.

"That this path of faith was prompted by my return to Japan to study sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japanese art and the art of nihonga that arose out of ancient Japan may seem ironic, but as I trace my influences I see the fingerprint of Japan on my childhood, a childhood of privilege."

Yet the beauty-soaked images of Mako's youth in Kamakura and the post-traumatic experience of 9/11 in New York City, cement for him the enduring insight that beauty

and sacrifice and suffering cannot be separated. They are unique cords, inextricably and mysteriously interwoven to pull us through our "Ground Zero realities" and to attach us to Christ and our fellow human beings in the process. The earth hides the blood of the past.

We often think of Romans 5:3-5 as a taxonomy or formula that may help assuage our silent suffering. In reality, that passage also very much describes the conditions that create an estuary; that place where life and beauty—life and beauty not found anywhere else—emerges. That unlikely place of hope and beauty is precisely because of the foundation of suffering and silence. Like Mako's paintings—layer after layer of paint absorbed into the canvas, and paint upon paint seems an unlikely place for beauty to emerge. Upon a closer inspection, it is because of that unlikely foundation of suffering that the subtle refraction of light—precisely because of its pulverization borne of suffering, and sacrifice—that beauty emerges.

In a certain irony, the Apostle Paul—prior to his conversion a well-known persecutor of those of faith—sheds light on the importance of suffering in Romans 3.

...but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Nothing epitomizes the correlation between suffering and beauty better than that of Christ; the ultimate hope and beauty only made possible through the silence, suffering and anguish endured by Christ.

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, lemasabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). (Matthew 27:46)

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

In the Shinto religion the mirror serves as one of the physical objects of contemplation, one of the three sacred objects. Therefore, the mirror cannot be broken or rendered useless. Endo reveals that Japan is a broken mirror. Paradoxically, it is the broken body

of Christ that turns the useless into the permanent, transforming the broken into the enduring new reality. Christ's resurrected body still holds the wounds of the suffering at Calvary. Japan can be one of the keys to unlock this mystery of the wound, of the shattered mirror. Just like the surface of my paintings, Japanese culture can become the avenue that leads to greater insight about how we may live beyond our Ground Zero conditions.

For further introspection and discussion...

1. In recounting his father's pioneering work in acoustics and linguistic research, Mako makes the point that his childhood home was a place of integration, not only of cultural heritages and natural heritages but the integration of sciences and the arts. How would you characterize your childhood home? Did you experience integration akin to what Mako describes? What about schism or disintegration or compartmentalization of faith with other areas of life? How has this starting point affected the way you process trauma? suffering? deprivation?
2. What are some examples of cultural estuaries that you draw from to feed your soul? This might be poetry, some type of visual art, fantasy novels, films, music, or travel experiences and other forms of natural beauty. Describe the process of how the "fresh water" of the estuary mixes with the "salt water" of your experience of pain to produce a spiritually rich and abundant ecosystem in your life. Estuaries are delicate and require constant attention to maintain balance. How do you achieve this balance?
3. As Mako stated, "How does the earth of your present experience hide the blood of the past?" Have you ever stopped to consider why visiting places after many years that represented physical, emotional, or spiritual pain earlier in life can literally send shock waves through you? Brainstorm some ways that current places of pain and trauma might be transformed into places of integration and healing.

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SILENCE

Discussion guide based on the novel by Shusaku Endo

Mako Fujimura's short films and his book *Silence and Beauty* are reflections borne of his personal journey through the classic work and insights of Shusaku Endo's *Silence*. Through the open-handedness of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, the following thoughtful questions offer penetrating insights into Endo's *Silence*, the Martin Scorsese film of the same name, and the subject matter found in this study guide.

As it pertains to Endo's book, *Silence*:

Share with the group one thing that struck you as you read (or viewed).

What questions does this story raise?

This story is often described as "atmospheric." Why so?

Who are the main characters?

Who is Kichijiro and what role does he fill? Is his defense of his actions plausible? Would we be like him if under similar pressure?

Why would a novel like *Silence* become an international best-seller, including in Japan? After all, it tells the story of Portuguese missionaries in seventeenth-century Japan, and ends up making both Japan and the Roman Catholic Church look pretty bad. Why is this story widely regarded as a masterpiece?

Could there be cultural or national "swamps" where the gospel simply can't take root?

Is God's silence in the face of persecution always a form of abandonment by God?

If the only way a Christian can save the lives of other Christians is by renouncing Christ, would it be right to do it? What if you only think you can save their lives (persecutors sometimes lie)? If you renounce Christ to save lives, can Christ "take it"? Might Christ even invite you to renounce him to save lives? Or is any thought along those lines mere self-deception?

In short, does Rodrigues betray Christ by trampling or does he follow Christ?

In general, should we calculate the possible consequences of our actions as the main basis for an ethically questionable decision, or just follow God's commands, and let God take care of the consequences?

What moral ambiguities test Christians today? Have you ever faced a quandary? For example, with a difficult relative? With a friend who is betraying his or her spouse? On the street in front of a panhandler? How do you decide what to do?

What are some small, undramatic ways we ourselves renounce Christ? At work. In our political choices. In our consumption of pop culture. In our family systems.

Where in the world today do Christians face real persecution?
What forms does contemporary persecution take?

Source:

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for the study and renewal of worship

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