O'Brien, Catherine. "The Compassion Connection." : . London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 170–191. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350003309.0016>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 15:33 UTC.

Copyright © O'Brien 2018. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

The Mystery of God's Love

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante sets out his unwavering Christian faith in Canto XXIV of *Paradiso*:

And I respond: In one God I believe,
 Sole and eterne, who moveth all the heavens
 With love and with desire, himself unmoved;
 And of such faith not only have I proofs
 Physical and metaphysical, but gives them
 Likewise the truth that from this place rains down
 Through Moses, through the Prophets and the Psalms,
 Through the Evangel, and through you, who wrote
 After the fiery Spirit sanctified you;
 In Persons three eterne believe, and these
 One essence I believe, so one and trine
 They bear conjunction both with 'sunt and 'est.'

The Catholic Church teaches: 'Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1993: 1023). In *Paradiso* 'the blessed are seen expanding their love more and more, through an ever growing concentration on God, until love is also an *understanding* of God, and hence of reality as a whole' (Casey 2009: 282).

Silence is a film in which Scorsese concentrates on *an understanding of God*, while also creating a bond with Endo, who 'stands with those sitting in the pews who feel inadequate and uncertain, who doubt whether they can be strong, heroic and faith-filled' (Fujimura 2016). At one point, Scorsese admitted that he was conflicted as to what to do with his own life: 'I wondered then and I still wonder whether I should quit everything and help the poor. But I wasn't, and I'm still not, strong enough' (in Keyser 1992: 10).

During a question and answer session after a screening of *Silence* in Los Angeles, Scorsese explained that *The Last Temptation of Christ* had taken him to a certain stage on his journey but that he realized that there was further to go:

But for myself, as a believer, unbeliever, doubter, have faith, not have faith, go through life, making mistakes, I don't know. Trying to make life better, to feel your way through to live in a better way for yourself and others primarily, *The Last Temptation of Christ* didn't take me that far. ... I knew [*Silence*] was for me, at this point in my life, the beckoning, the call. It said, 'Figure me out,' or at least try to. ... I am not Thomas Merton, I'm not Dorothy Day ... so you admire them and everything else but ... how can you be like them? ... How do you live it in your daily life? (In Pacatte 2016)

Before he went into production on *Silence*, Scorsese saw the film as 'dealing with nature and the evanescence of life, as opposed to it merely being about these two priests who are trying to sustain Christianity in Japan after the religion has been outlawed' (in Schickel 2013). Back in 1974, he had expressed his disgust at the Church for being 'run like a business'; and his desire 'to make a film in which a priest would discover, after trying to save other people, that he is the one who needs to be saved' (in Wilson 2011: 38). However, having read the novel of *Silence* in 1989, it took Scorsese many years to bring his adaptation to fruition because he felt that he did not understand the material and was not ready to get to 'the purity of faith'.

* * *

Writing of *The Divine Comedy*, Reynolds points out that each soul is striving 'to return to God who created it, yet it is liable in its journey to take the wrong path' (Reynolds 2006: 84). In *Silence*, Scorsese tells the story of Christians who are on that very quest and, as a result of their actions, may reach their destination later rather than sooner, if at all. St Ignatius, who founded the Jesuit order, 'traversed a circuitous route, and he recognized that God's activity cannot be limited to people who consider themselves "religious". ... To use one of Ignatius's favourite expressions, his path is "a way of proceeding" along the way to God' (Martin 2010a).

In *Who's That Knocking at My Door*, J.R. and his friends drive to Copake for a three-day sojourn (a markedly symbolic number in terms of *The Divine Comedy*) and see a traffic sign in the centre for 'Route 22: North South' – they could go in either direction. It is a geographical choice that resonates with the life of St Ignatius, who reportedly made a visit to the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem,

believed to be the site of Christ's Ascension, in order to discover whether the feet of Jesus were pointing north or south when he ascended into Heaven. 'The tradition Ignatius was following was that, if the feet pointed southwards, the followers of Jesus were directed southwards to proclaim the gospel among the Jewish people only. If pointed northwards, it would mean that the gospel is intended for the whole world' (Neary 2017). Without St Ignatius's decision to take the gospel to the Far East, there would have been no Jesuits in Japan, and no Scorsese film called *Silence*.

Endo, who had also thought about becoming a priest like Scorsese, set the action of *Silence* in the time following the Shimabara Uprising when the rebels carried a flag bearing the motto 'Praised be the Blessed Sacrament' (Whelan 1996: 9) and 37,000 people were killed. The Prologue of Scorsese's *Silence* pays tribute to the bravery of the priests who were prepared to travel to Japan during this era of terror and refused to renounce their beliefs. As noted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993: 2473), 'Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he [*sic*] is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude.'

The missionary priests faced the possibility of laying down their lives for a greater Cause, following the example of Stephen, the first martyr, whom Dante celebrates in *The Divine Comedy*:

Then saw I people hot in fire of wrath,
 With stones a young man slaying, clamorously
 Still crying to each other, 'Kill him! kill him!'
 And him I saw bow down, because of death
 That weighed already on him, to the earth,
 But of his eyes made ever gates to heaven,
 Imploring the high Lord, in so great strife,
 That he would pardon those his persecutors,
 With such an aspect as unlocks compassion. (*Purg.* XV)

Indeed, *Silence* opens with a letter from Ferreira in which he writes of the martyrs: 'The story of their courage gives hope to those of us priests who remain here in secret.' Therefore, there is a disjuncture when the action shifts to a cold, white-walled room in which the two young Jesuits, Rodrigues and Garupe, sit opposite Fr Valignano and hear him say, 'Ferreira is lost to us.' The incredulity of the priests is understandable as they hear their mentor's words of heroic

encouragement via his epistle but cannot see the image available to the audience: Ferreira falling to his knees and putting his hand to his mouth in despair. He has become an unreliable narrator. 'We will not abandon our hidden Christians who live in fear. We only grow stronger in His love,' he says, as his head sinks down in submission rather than in prayer.

The mission to discover the truth about what happened to Ferreira also has a personal element for the two young priests: to save their father figure – the man who nurtured them in the faith and 'shaped the world for us'. Even if Ferreira has 'denounced God in public and surrendered the faith', they believe that they need to help him 'to save his soul'. As they descend the white stone steps outside the imposing cathedral in Macao, the eye of God shot, which makes the priests look small and vulnerable, also suggests that they are under a heavenly gaze.

Although Valignano expresses confidence in a divine plan, he warns them: 'The moment you set foot in that country, you step into high danger. You will be the last two priests to go. An army of two.' Boxer argues that the Jesuit 'General' was 'a commander in chief in fact as well as in name' (Boxer 1993: 45) and perhaps there was some 'similarity of training between these soldiers of the Cross and the samurai nurtured in the spartan precepts of the Warriors' Way' (Boxer 1993: 48). However, as they march along, the two young priests are soldiers without weapons.

As Rodrigues and Garupe set off across the ocean, there is an overhead shot of the prow of their ship as it appears through the waves, as if God is watching over them. Rodrigues reflects on the twenty years since the persecution broke out: 'The black soil of Japan is filled with the wailing of so many Christians. The red blood of priests has flowed profusely. The walls of the churches have fallen down.' As he speaks, the ship is obscured by the clouds as if they are now on their own. The camera catches the last rays of the sun as an image of the glory of God – but they will soon find themselves in darkness.

The hidden Christians

Silence is a story of courage in which the traditional heroes are not the Jesuit priests but the poorest members of society whom they meet. Whatever the final fate of the real Ferreira may have been, there is no doubt that there were Japanese people who were prepared to die as martyrs for their faith. When the hidden Christians come to seek Rodrigues and Garupe in the caves by the shore, they are well aware of the danger: 'There are more executions than ever.'

In other Scorsese films, the Mafia may hold the power over life and death, but here it is the Inquisitor Inoue. Antoni Ucerler, a Jesuit priest and historian who was a consultant on the film, explains that the authorities were afraid that the Christians had divided loyalties because of their devotion to God rather than the Shogun: 'Such a faith undermined the entire system of absolute rule' and was, therefore, regarded as an 'evil teaching' (in Pinsky 2014).

As the Christians hold flaming torches as they walk to Tomogi village, the light appears to be a symbol of renewed life (rather than the torches that the guards carry as they come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane in *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which is the mark of betrayal). 'We hide the Kirishitan images but God still sees us, yes?' is the hopeful question of a villager named Mokichi (Shin'ya Tsukamoto). As Christopher Deacy explains, 'By placing their faith in Christ, [people] grasp the significance of the present routine because it leads to a future called "eternal life"' (in Deacy 2012: 81). The Japanese villagers have certainly taken that path and maintained their faith despite the dangers. Rodrigues reveals in voice-over: 'I was overwhelmed by the love that I felt from these people even though their faces couldn't show it.'

Yet, the priests are not presented as gallant heroes. The Jesuits appear fearful and ask undiplomatically phrased questions: 'How do you live like this?' is a query that might be interpreted as a comment on the Christians' poverty rather than their resolution. When the priests are given the food that the villagers have clearly sacrificed for their sake, they begin to devour it hungrily and then notice ashamedly that their hosts are saying grace in Latin. 'It is you who feed us,' says Ichizo, the 'Jisama' who baptizes the babies and leads the people in prayer because they have no other sacraments to sustain them. The two priests are often visualized together in the frame, creating a 'them and us' situation in which the hidden Christians often appear more virtuous.

The atmosphere of early Christianity in Rome is evoked. There is a grave-like cavity under the floor of their hut in which the priests can hide if necessary; and they say Mass at night 'just as they did in the catacombs'. An exterior shot of the building in which the Mass takes place reveals the glow of the naked flames visible against the darkness – the lights that could betray them to the Inquisitor.

When Rodrigues travels to the Goto islands, he finds that the people are not afraid to worship in the daytime in this location. During the consecration scene at Mass, the sunlight streams into the hut and illuminates the elevated host and the face of the priest. (**Figure 9.1**) The congregation is so large that Rodrigues divides the hosts into small pieces so that everyone is able to receive

Figure 9.1 The Joy of the priesthood – bringing the Eucharist to the Hidden Christians in *Silence*.

Communion. ‘On that day, the faithful received fresh hope. And I was renewed,’ he reports, bringing the topic back to himself but sensing the fervour around him. The threat that these people faced will become clear to him when he returns to the islands on a second occasion and finds that the village has been ransacked and the people have fled.

The martyrs

When a number of the villagers from Tomogi are about to be taken hostage in an attempt to root out Christianity, Mokichi says they are not afraid to die and will never surrender the priests. His own vow turns out to be true – these are not the empty words that Peter speaks in the New Testament: ‘Even though all should have their faith shaken, mine will not be’ (Mk 14.29). As they part for the last time, Mokichi gives Rodrigues a handmade crucifix, explaining its symbolic significance: ‘It was all we had.’ There is a close-up of Mokichi’s hand covered in dirt as Rodrigues accepts the simple gift with the acknowledgement, ‘Your faith gives me strength, Mokichi. I wish I could give as much to you.’ At this stage, the audience does not know the ultimate relevance of the gesture. Mokichi replies, ‘My love for God is strong. Could that be the same as faith?’ In fact, the faith of Mokichi will carry Rodrigues through until the end, as he will treasure this crucifix for the rest of his life, concealing it in his clothes when he is in prison, and dying with it when he is cremated.

Although the hostages trample on the *fumi-e*, with their muddy feet adding to the sense of degradation, they are unable (with the predictable exception of

Kichijiro) to spit upon a crucifix and to say the Virgin Mary 'is a whore'. In the novel of *Silence* Rodrigues notices the devotion to the Virgin Mary. 'Indeed, I myself since coming to Tomogi have been a little worried seeing that the peasants sometimes seem to honor Mary rather than Christ' (Endo 1969: 56). In the film, one of the precious hidden images that the villagers uncover is 'Our Lady of the Snow' – a reproduction of which Scorsese gave to Pope Francis during his papal audience in November 2016.

Endo was inspired by 'Eric Fromm's distinction between a mother religion in which deities are nurturing and forgiving, and a father religion in which God is fearful, judgmental and punitive' (Dougill 2015: 148). In Dante's *Paradiso*, the Pilgrim meets the Virgin Mary on his journey towards salvation in Canto XXXIII:

In thee compassion is, in thee is pity,
 In thee magnificence; in thee unites
 Whate'er of goodness is in any creature.
 Now doth this man, who from the lowest depth
 Of the universe as far as here has seen
 One after one the spiritual lives,
 Supplicate thee through grace for so much power
 That with his eyes he may uplift himself
 Higher towards the uttermost salvation.

This maternal image is pursued by Endo in *Silence* and his writings about Japanese Catholicism, in which he stressed the appeal of 'the mother love of God, the love that forgives wrongs and binds wounds and draws, rather than forces, others to itself' (Fujimura 2016).

Scorsese has also explained his interest in 'a more nurturing, female side of the religion' and his attempt to develop 'a nurturing compassion' (in Schickel 2013). His appreciation for the maternal nature of God is shown by the fact that the title of his early film project *Jerusalem, Jerusalem!* was inspired by a quotation from the New Testament when Jesus looks across at the city and says, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings' (Mt. 23.37). It is also notable that Charlie goes towards the *Pietà* in the church scene in *Mean Streets* rather than any of the other statues. Endo believed that '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' (Fujimura 2016).

In a voice-over that is half whispered, as if he is afraid of being overheard by the Samurai, Rodrigues says, 'These people are the most devoted of God's creatures on earth. ... God sends us trials to test us and everything he does is good. And I prayed to undergo trials like his son. But why must their trial be so terrible? And why, when I look in my own heart, do the answers I give them seem so weak?' As Ratzinger points out, 'The doctrinal assertion that justification is by faith and not by works means that justification happens through sharing in the death of Christ, that is by walking in the way of martyrdom, the daily drama by which we prefer what is right and true to the claims of sheer existence, through the spirit of love which faith makes possible' (1988: 99). However, in *Silence*, it is the drama of explicit, painful martyrdom that is played out.

The following scene is of Mokichi tied to a cross, being given *sake* to drink, as Jesus was given the 'sponge soaked in wine' (Jn 19.29) by the Roman soldiers. 'I prayed they remembered our Lord's suffering and took courage and comfort from it,' says Rodrigues, who is observing events with Garupe from the hillside, like the women in the New Testament who are 'looking on from a distance' (Mk 15.40) as Jesus is crucified.

The execution scene takes place near the caves where the priests first sought shelter when they arrived in Japan. It was the site of their landing when they supposedly brought hope and salvation – but it has now become a place of death. There are three crosses in a Calvary tableau with Mokichi in the middle. (Figure 9.2) It is believed that St Peter felt that he was not worthy to be killed in the same manner as Jesus and asked to be crucified upside down. In *Silence*, it gradually becomes clear that there is another dimension to the punishment, as the crosses are by the ocean, so that the incoming tide adds to the pain of

Figure 9.2 On the way to Paradise: the Tomogi martyrs in *Silence*.

crucifixion. There are shots of the crashing waves, in which the beauty and power of nature become threatening as the sea drowns the victims.

In a 'manual on martyrdom' the advice was given: 'While being tortured visualize the Passion of Jesus. ... Hope and confidence should occupy your mind, since at that moment God shall tender a special help' (Boxer 1993: 354). There were Jesuit publications that explained 'that eternal salvation outweighed the more temporary nature of physical distress: better to suffer a few hours of extreme pain than to endure the horrors of hell for all eternity' (see Dougill 2015: 103). Inoue 'noted in his memoranda that Christians had been taught that they would forfeit their entrance into paradise if they died with feelings of hate towards their persecutors. Consequently they very rarely displayed any resentment, however much they suffered' (Boxer 1993: 341).

When St Stephen was martyred, he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7.56). Hanging on a cross, Ichizo looks up to the sky and cries, 'Paraiso!' and bows his head and dies. The last words of St Stephen are, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' and 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them' (Acts 7.59-60). At this moment, Mokichi's concern is for his friend: 'Deus-sama. Please receive Jisama's spirit. Jisama's suffering has ended. Receive him Lord.' It is as if Mokichi takes on the role of the priest who would perform the last rites, as they have no one else by their side. As Mokichi cries out 'Lord!' and, 'In Your glory. Please, Jesus!' the priests bow their heads and pray in their helpless state, cowering in their hiding place.

The death of the Tomogi martyrs is a helpful illustration of Ratzinger's claim:

Only God incarnate can draw us out of the waters by his power and hold us firm. Only he can make us stand up straight on the breakers of the sea of mortality. His promise is that we will attain the vision of God, which is life, not through speculative thinking but by the purity of an undivided heart, in the faith and love that take the Lord's hand and are led by it. (1988: 152)

The people 'who persevere in faithfulness to Christ are "blessed" even if they "die in the Lord"' (Rev. 14.12-13) (see Burk et al. 2016: 39-40). Scorsese once said that he was inspired by those moments in films that stay in the mind, and that he wanted to create those effects himself for his audiences: 'It'll change their lives a little bit. I don't know – that kind of thing. Those moments that you don't forget' (in Kelly 1980: 22). The crucifixion scene in the sea is one such moment.

If Peter and the apostles had been captured by the Romans when Jesus was arrested, they would not have been free to spread the Good News of the Resurrection three days later. In the novel of *Silence*, Endo draws attention to

this fact by mentioning the story of a Franciscan in Japan who gave himself up and, as a result, 'the whole underground work of the mission was impaired and the safety of the Christians was jeopardized. ... Its moral was that a priest does not exist in order to become a martyr; he must preserve his life in order that the flame of faith may not utterly die when the church is persecuted' (Endo 1969: 73). Yet, rather than seeming noble, the priests appear to be the cowards who are 'giving up' and 'running away' as Garupe himself fears.

The audience subsequently hears the text of Rodrigues's letter to Valignano, which is still a public profession of his faith to his superior: 'Fr Valignano, you will say that their death is not meaningless. Surely God heard their prayers as they died. But did He hear their screams?' Yet the Tomogi martyrs did not scream – they went to their deaths with conviction. In his confusion, Rodrigues asks, 'How can I explain His silence to these people who have endured so much? I need all my strength to understand it myself.' He still sees himself in the superior, educated role, yet the villagers – the less sophisticated men – are the ones who accept death with the kind of child-like trust of which Jesus speaks when asked who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven: 'Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. 18.4).

When Rodrigues himself is captured and sits with other prisoners, they are initially delighted to see him and then gradually surprised to discover that he is afraid. One woman called Monica (named after the mother of St Augustine, as Rodrigues points out) gives him the only food she has (like Elijah and the widow in 1 Kgs 17.7-16). Rodrigues responds gratefully with the words, 'Blessed be God' but he is no great prophet (although Elijah himself famously ran away, too, at one point (1 Kgs 19.3)) and he cannot save her life. Indeed, Rodrigues asks the prisoners, 'Why are you so calm? We are all about to die like that.' The Japanese Christians look confused at his outburst, and it is Monica (Nana Komatsu) who preaches the sermon that presumably should have come from Rodrigues's lips, recalling the words of their former priest who died at Unzen: 'Fr Juan said that if we die, we will go to Paraiso. ... Isn't it good to die? Paraiso is so much better than here. No one hungry, never sick. No taxes, no hard work.' Rising to the occasion a little too late, Rodrigues responds: 'Padre Juan was right. There is no hard work in Paraiso. There is no work at all. There is [*sic*] no taxes. There is no suffering. We hope we'll be united with God.' He looks heavenwards. 'There will be no pain.'

In the Nagasaki prison, Rodrigues spends his days in peace, making rosaries, praying and hearing confessions. 'Thank you, Lord, for the gentle days here,' he says as he ministers to the prisoners. If it were not for the wooden bars, it would appear to be a Bible study group. He quotes from Ps. 16.8: 'I shall never

be shaken.' Rodrigues's difficulty is that he cannot live up to the image that he has of himself. He initially sees himself in the heroic mode, telling the Tomogi hostages that they should step on the *fumi-e* ('It's all right to trample') because he believes that they are weaker than himself. Yet, he then has to stand by and watch the Japanese Christians suffer while he remains alive.

The scene in which five prisoners are called forward to step on the *fumi-e* is shown from his point of view as he observes events through the bars of his jail. When the prisoners refuse to comply and are returned (with the exception of one man named Juan) to their cell, it seems to be a moment of victory. Rodrigues is relieved at this turn of events, and he sinks down to the ground and says, 'Thank you, Lord, for hearing my prayer.' But the follow-up is unexpected and it quickly seems that his prayer has gone unanswered: a Samurai strides across the yard and beheads Juan with a stroke of his sword. Rodrigues hears the screams from the onlookers and Juan's head rolls into view followed by a trail of blood. Rodrigues's only response is to bang the walls of his cell with his fists, crying aloud and retching. The camera pans from left to right behind the prison bars, adopting Rodrigues's disorientated perspective as he tries to make sense of the violence, followed by the appearance of Kichijiro to commit yet another act of apostasy.

Rodrigues then is forced to watch his friend Garupe accept martyrdom willingly. He is led to the ocean to see his fellow prisoners bound in straw mats so that they will sink more quickly beneath the waves. If Garupe apostatizes, the Japanese will be saved; if Garupe does not renounce his own faith, the Christians will be thrown into the sea. The Interpreter explains to Rodrigues, 'There are still hundreds of Christian peasants on the islands off the coast. We want the padre to deny and be an example to them.' But Garupe refuses: he swims after the boat that is carrying the people to their deaths, trying in vain to save Monica who is the last prisoner to be thrown overboard, and he ultimately drowns with her. Rodrigues is left powerless, kneeling on the sand, his face stained with tears. Inside he is crying, 'Apostatize! For their sake, Lord, do not leave this to us.' He also knows that he is now the last Jesuit priest left in Japan.

Rodrigues's pilgrimage

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's Pilgrim moves joyously towards God at the centre of *Paradiso*. At the heart of *Silence* is the pilgrimage of Rodrigues, his

relationship with Jesus, and his journey towards death when he, too, believes that he will meet his Maker. As he sets out on his mission, Rodrigues begins with his dreams of following St Francis Xavier with the prayer: 'What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What will I do for Christ?' When Rodrigues is alone before his arrest, he kneels on the rocks and scoops water from a stream with his hand, seeing his own reflection in the water. The image gradually evolves into the face of Jesus in the El Greco painting – the picture that he loves. At this point, he laughs loudly at the incongruity, splashing his head in the water in his despair. It is at this moment that he is captured, having been betrayed by Kichijiro in the role of Judas.

Rodrigues is brought through the streets on a horse, as Jesus entered Jerusalem. But the people do not greet him with palm branches and shouts of joy. He rides while the Japanese Christians walk, but his elevated position singles him out for abuse rather than for honour. 'I thought that martyrdom would be my salvation. Please, please, God, do not let it be my shame,' he prays.

In the prison, he continues to meditate on the face of Jesus in the El Greco painting: 'Speaking to me, I'm sure of it. Promising I will not abandon you.' However, this time he visualizes the picture against the floor of his cell, so that the face of Jesus is divided into two by the gap between the wooden boards. The cracks are already beginning to show in the perfect image (of the painting and of himself). As he repeats the phrase, 'I will not abandon you,' the question is: does he believe that Jesus will never abandon him? Or is he trying to convince himself that he will never abandon Jesus? It is now that he is becoming fully aware of his own weakness: 'I fear, Jesus, forgive me, I may not be worthy of you.'

During Rodrigues's several Gethsemane moments, he remembers the Christians who have gone before him: the beheading of Juan at the prison, and the drowning in the sea of Monica and Garupe. Alone in his cell, Rodrigues mumbles, 'My God, why have you forsaken me? As your son. Your son's words on the cross.' He is taking on a Christotypical role but becoming incoherent in his despair as he thinks of the martyrs: 'Ludicrous. Ludicrous. Stupid. He's not going to answer.' He cries, unable to hear any response to his prayers. There is an eye of God shot of Rodrigues on the floor of his cell in a foetal position, which evokes the opening of *The Last Temptation of Christ* when Jesus is lying on the earth, unsure of his mission.

It is in this weakened state that Rodrigues is taken through the streets in a palanquin to a Buddhist temple to meet 'the Other' – his former teacher, Ferreira, who has, indeed, apostatized. Ferreira is first shown with distorted

features, a fact that gradually becomes understandable when the shot is rotated to show that he is actually upside down (giving him the deformed look of Max Cady in *Cape Fear* when he hung from his exercise bar and betrayed the trust of Danielle Bowden). It is a scene from the past when Ferreira was tortured in the pit, praying the Our Father as he is lowered down.

The meeting with Ferreira is another test of Rodrigues's resolve: the gaunt figure in front of him, writing his refutations of Christianity, is a foretaste of his own future. There is a shot of Ferreira's horrified face as he steps on the *fumi-e*, then he falls to his knees and embraces the image. It is not clear how much of this event he describes to Rodrigues or whether the audience is given an insight into his memory (as in the rape scene in *Who's That Knocking at My Door* when the Girl recounts her trauma). When Rodrigues is transferred to another prison cell, he finds the words 'Laudate Eum' (Praise Him) carved into the wall and believes it to be a sign of hope left for him by a previous prisoner. So he is distressed when he learns that the words were written by Ferreira, the apostate. He is constantly undermined as he searches for fresh courage in his time of trial.

With his hair flowing down, Rodrigues has begun to resemble a traditional Jesus-figure in a New Testament film, but he has lost his inner conviction. He is talking to Jesus about the night of his Passion: 'In the garden you said, "My soul is sorrowful even unto death". I would bleed for you. I would. I would die for you. His prayers are interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Kichijiro, asking to make his fourth confession for his many acts of apostasy and his betrayal of the priest: 'Padre, forgive me.' As Kichijiro is dragged away, Rodrigues makes the sign of the cross wearily, as if he has given him absolution, but the sense of superiority that he once felt is no more.

It is now that he is faced with his greatest moral dilemma. He does not understand that the distressing noises that he can hear outside are the groans of five Christians who are hanging in the pit and will remain there until he apostatizes. Ferreira confronts him with accusations that have the ring of truth: 'You see Jesus in Gethsemane and believe your trial is the same as his. Those five in the pit are suffering, too, just like Jesus. But they don't have your pride. They would never compare themselves to Jesus. Do you have the right to make them suffer?' The faces of the two Jesuits are framed within the wooden bars of the cell, as if they are separated in a confessional, but Rodrigues sees Ferreira as the satanic tempter rather than his confessor: 'You excuse yourself, you excuse yourself. That is the spirit of darkness.' In the novel of *Silence*, Rodrigues remembers that he has heard of apostates being used by the authorities 'as

though they felt they could justify their own ugly crime by adding one more to their number. Their way of thinking is akin to that of the fallen angels when they allure men into sin' (Endo 1969: 72).

Ferreira continues: 'What would you do for them? Pray? And get what in return? Only more suffering. A suffering only you can end, not God. I prayed, too, Rodrigues. It doesn't help. Go on. Pray. But pray with your eyes open.' Two guards drag Rodrigues outside, and for the first time he sees the pit for himself, with the flames in the background to confirm the hellish theme. Ferreira explains: 'You can spare them. They call out for help just as you called to God. He is silent but you do not have to be.'

Rodrigues cries out to the prisoners to apostatize ('Korobu!') but he is told that they already have – although, notably, this fact is never proved and it is not known whether any of them would have died willingly for their faith like Mokichi. 'They are here for you, Rodrigues,' continues Ferreira, explaining that, if Rodrigues does not apostatize, the Christians cannot be saved. Ferreira says: 'A Priest should act in imitation of Christ. If Christ were here ... If Christ were here, He would have acted. Apostatized for their sake.' (This is the most controversial line.) Rodrigues replies in anguish, 'No, He's here, Christ is here. I just can't hear Him.' Ferreira continues to urge him on: 'Show God you love Him. Save the lives of the people He loves.' He puts the *fumi-e* down on the ground himself. 'There is something more important than the judgement of the Church. You are now going to fulfil the most painful act of love that has ever been performed.' As Rodrigues, breathing heavily in his anguish, looks towards the five victims, the Interpreter adds his own inducement: 'It's only a formality.'

John Paul Meenan takes a very negative view of the scene, regarding these words as devilish counsel: 'I wonder whether Thomas More heard a similar voice while he sat in the Tower, as King Henry's ministers cajoled him into signing the declaration that would make the potentate "Head of the Church in England": "Sign, sign, for what, really is a piece of paper and ink?"' (Meenan 2016). The key distinction here is that Rodrigues is not encouraged to betray his beliefs in order to save his own skin, as was the case with the other Christian martyrs who had gone before him. He is being asked to renounce his faith in order to save five other people who are suffering in front of him. But Meenan also points to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states that moral evil is 'incommensurably more harmful than physical evil' (#311) and to 'the constant and firm teaching of the Church that moral evil must be resisted even to the point of death, and not just one's own death, but the suffering and death of others, even of those we love' (Meenan 2016).

Steven Greydanus sets out the dilemma with reference to St Augustine, who in his treatise *On Lying* wrote of 'the hypothetical case of a man who refuses to apostatize even when threatened with the execution of his father. ... Such a man, Augustine concluded, is not a parricide; the authorities, not he, are responsible for the father's death' (Greydanus 2017). It is a case supported by McCabe: 'For example, if I allow someone innocent to be killed rather than tell a lie which would save that person, I am not committing an evil and I am in no sense guilty of the person's death or of anything else' (2010: 3). Rodrigues is faced with this exact situation but decides to tell the lie (i.e. apostatize) and save the victims.

But Adam Roberts puts forward another valid argument: 'If you were tortured for your beliefs, it would of course take strength to hold out. But if *others* are tortured for your beliefs, and you still refuse to yield, do we still call that strength? Doesn't it look more like a kind of pitilessness?' (Roberts 2017). Garupe takes this decision when he refuses to apostatize and sees the Japanese Christians drowned in the sea, although he is soon to follow of his own volition.

For Rodrigues, it is obviously not 'only a formality' to put his foot on the *fumi-e*. It is not simply a matter of desecrating a holy symbol. Indeed, in his research on Italian culture, Gambino points out that Italians who had not received the Divine Intervention for which they had prayed would submit statues 'to public ridicule. Some were bound in chains and others were spat upon or stoned in the piazza. ... During the volcanic eruption [of Vesuvius in 1906] when a stream of white hot lava headed towards Naples, residents of the city placed statues of the city's patron, San Gennaro [who is honoured in the street festival in *Mean Streets*], directly in the path of the threatening flow, shouting to the saint, "Save our city or perish!"' (Gambino 2011: 228). In *Who's That Knocking at My Door* the statue of the Madonna and Child sits among the kitchenware rather than on an altar but without any sense of disrespect. Scorsese refers to a scene in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Allen 1986) when Mickey (played by Woody Allen himself) thinks about converting to Catholicism and 'sees a 3-D Jesus winking at him. ... That's a low blow in the movie, but we deserve it. We let these images take over. Of course, people don't worship these images, they worship the God that the images represent' (in Kelly 1996: 227–8).

But for the Japanese Christians, the *fumi-e* 'uniquely portrays their own experience of choosing between being a Christian and being a Japanese' (Fujimura 2016). It is not the object itself that is sacred but what the act of stepping upon it represents for the identity of the person concerned and his relationship with God. And for Rodrigues, it means the complete public dismantling of his character and his self-belief. Ferreira's words are close to the

truth when he makes reference to 'the judgement of the Church'. For reputation and pride have been central elements of Rodrigues's personality.

To emphasize the momentousness of the scene, the sound is cut completely – with powerful effect in the cinema. There is a close-up of the *fumi-e*, on which there is an image of Jesus's sorrowful face with his eyes closed in pain. Then the silence is broken and the audience hear a gentle male voice: 'Come ahead now. It's all right. Step on me. I understand your pain.' There is a further close-up of the face of Jesus. 'I was born into this world to share men's pain. I carried this cross for your pain. Your life is with me now. Step.' The silence returns.

Scorsese faced the dilemma: 'How do I do the voice of Jesus?' He reacted against the Hollywood epics that he loved as a child with their glorious music and the beautiful language of the Bible. The divine voice sounds like Ciaran Hinds, the actor who plays Valignano, the Jesuit whom Rodrigues addresses as his 'father' in his letters. It is voice that he can trust to show him the way.

When Endo's novel was translated into English, one of the key issues was the difficulty of rendering the subtleties of the Japanese language, especially with regard to the voice of Christ. In the novel translated by William Johnston, the scene reads:

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. How his foot aches! And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: 'Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross.' (Endo 1969: 171)

Junko Endo, the writer's wife, pointed out the misleading use of the imperative (rather than the permissive mood) in the above translation of the word 'trample'. She explains: 'The Christ in bronze talks to the priest as if he were ... a mother who, sharing the anguish and pain for her child, says, "You may step on me now that I have perceived your suffering and weakness." The difference between "Trample!" and "You may step on me" is so clear that there is no need to make a further comment' (Endo 1999: 145). Scorsese has clearly addressed this issue in the film script.

His understanding of the significance of the scene comes across in Andrew Garfield's recollection of the shoot in an interview with Paul Elie: 'It's something we had both waited for, but Marty had waited much longer – he had waited decades to film that scene.' Elie reports: 'The director was ready; the priest

stepped – and then there was a technical difficulty. “I almost lost my mind, and I think Marty did, too,” Garfield recalled. “He wanted it to be done in one take.” There was a second take, and the priest profaned the image of Christ once and for all’ (Elie 2016).

As Rodrigues steps on the *fumi-e*, the face of Christ in the El Greco painting – the face that Rodrigues loves – is seen once more. The surrounding lighting has a red glow. There is a close-up of Rodrigues’s right foot on the image, and then he falls to the floor in slow motion with his hand on the *fumi-e*. The ambient sounds return, bringing to attention the ongoing agony of the Christian victims. Inoue is watching the scene, and he turns away as the Interpreter gives the signal to raise the prisoners out of the pit.

In *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Jesus controversially claims that he has the easier task in comparison to Judas, and *Silence* certainly presents the idea that it is traumatic to be left behind with the mark of the traitor. Ricoeur writes that ‘martyrdom, accepted with joy and sometimes desired, inclines a man to regard death as the beginning of true life, the life with Christ; by contrast, the sojourn in this “valley of tears” seems to be no more than a time of trial and a figure of evil’ (Ricoeur 1967: 335). Rodrigues is clearly in a valley of tears. In the words of Dante:

Now knoweth he how dearly it doth cost
Not following Christ, by the experience
Of this sweet life and of its opposite. (*Par.* XX)

Peter C. Phan, a Jesuit theologian, asks: ‘Are we allowed to do an essentially evil act to obtain a good result? If it is done to save himself, then the answer is no. But the novel [of *Silence*] is so complex because he does it for his followers, for the good end of saving his flock. He will go to hell – but he will go to hell for their sake’” (see Elie 2016).

As a Jesuit, who is familiar with *The Spiritual Exercises*, Rodrigues would have carried out the meditation on Hell at the end of the first week and gained ‘a deep awareness of the pain suffered by the damned, so that if I should forget the love of the Eternal Lord, at least the fear of punishment will help me to avoid falling into sin’ (in Balthasar 1988: 86). He might also consider the warning to potential apostates that people who have ‘been instructed in the way of Truth [and] fall from it will be more bitterly afflicted in Inferno than those who have never come into contact with the Law’ (in Dougill 2015: 103–4). The obvious question is: will Rodrigues really end his pilgrimage in Hell?

Mercy

As Rodrigues commits his act of apostasy, a cock crows in the background – a sound which is evidently associated with St Peter's betrayal of Jesus. While Rodrigues has seen Kichijiro as the key traitor in his personal narrative, he now finds himself associated with St Peter's moment of shame. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Rodrigues was well aware of the 'Feed my lambs' scene in St John's Gospel, when Jesus asks three times: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' and Peter replies three times: 'Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.' Jesus had once said, 'Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father' (Mt. 10.32-33). Yet, Peter was clearly given a second chance.

In *Paradiso*, the Pilgrim meets people who have broken their religious vows: 'True substances are these which thou beholdest, / Here relegate for breaking of some vow' (*Par.* III). Although they are in the outer realms of heaven, they are content with their situation:

And his will is our peace; this is the sea
To which is moving onward whatsoever
It doth create, and all that nature makes. (*Par.* III)

In writing his novel, Endo was concerned with the responses of the Christians who lived during the era of persecution: 'What kind of people were they, and how did they feel about the act of betrayal? What would he himself have done?' (see Dougill 2015: 143). Boxer points out that, after 1614, many of the apostasies 'were only "from the teeth out," and induced solely by the pain or the fear of torture' (Boxer 1993: 361). However, there were stern warnings against a display of apostasy that masks an inner faith: 'One might say: My mind is not changed at all but I have declared apostasy only in appearance, for continuing to live. This is an evident fraud. It is usual with a traitor that he says otherwise than as he thinks' (in Dougill 2015: 104).

The film is capable of sparking intense debate among cinema audiences. *Silence* raises a raft of issues for the moral theologian with regard to suffering: 'Good people do not intervene because they are powerless. Wicked people do not intervene because they are evil. Which of these groups does God resemble?' (McCabe 2010: 3). Scorsese himself states: 'Failing, doing something that is morally reprehensible, that is a great sin – well, many people will never come back from that. But the Christian way would be to get up and try again. Maybe

not consciously, but you get yourself into a situation where you can make another choice. And that's the situation Rodrigues is in' (in Elie 2016).

Children mock Rodrigues and call him 'Apostate Paul'. In the novel, it is recorded that he had visions at night when 'the Inquisition, just like the Last Judgement in the *Apocalypse*, was pursuing him vividly and realistically' (Endo 1969: 175). However, Endo himself castigated people who condemned the apostates: 'It shows not the shallow faith of those who end up apostatizing, but it reveals the lack of compassion in the ones making such a judgment' (in Fujimura 2016).

Unlike Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, 'Silence is not a triumphant pilgrimage with clear outcomes, but a meandering pilgrimage of one wounded by life and confounded by faith, whose experience of faith has been punctuated by betrayals, his own and those of others' (Fujimura 2016). Rodrigues's sad, drawn face indicates that he is now one of 'the walking dead' (in Doak 2015: 11). Yet, Rodrigues never really abandons his faith in God. Gary Wills compares him to Graham Greene's 'whiskey priest' who does not lose his faith in *The Power and the Glory*; and he points out that Rodrigues 'does defect, not from weakness but from love, to spare Christian converts the persecution mounted against them' (in Gessel 2015: 32).

In the final section of the film, a Dutch physician named Dieter Albrecht takes up the story in 1641. Ferreira and Rodrigues are forced to examine imported goods to see if they have a Christian symbolism, and it appears that Rodrigues is the more rigorous of the two carrying out the task. When Ferreira draws attention to this fact ('We were taught to love those who scorned us'), Rodrigues replies coldly, 'I feel nothing for them.' At Ferreira's surprising response ('Only Our Lord can judge your heart'), Rodrigues whispers, 'You said "Our Lord"'. That and 'I doubt it,' are Ferreira's final words. The audience does not see him again.

Rodrigues is given a Japanese name and a wife (a widow with a son) but it is not stated whether he remains celibate (unlike in the earlier film version, *Chinmoku* (1971) directed by Masahiro Shinoda, in which the priest aggressively consummates his marriage). In his last onscreen meeting with Inoue, it is revealed that there are still Christians on the islands of Ikitsuki and Goto, who will not be pursued because the roots of their faith are cut. In his final comment on the situation, Inoue informs Rodrigues consolingly, 'You were not defeated by me. You were defeated by this swamp of Japan. Welcome.'

Rodrigues lives in Edo for the rest of his life and writes regular vows of apostasy as requested, although he exchanges silent glances with his wife as he hands over the documents. The relationship between Rodrigues and Kichijiro is now transformed, as the Jesuit is grateful to be supported by the man he had once pitied and condemned. However, when Kichijiro calls him 'padre', Rodrigues closes the window so that no one can hear and explains, 'Not any more. I'm a fallen priest.' Kichijiro pleads with him to hear his confession, so that he can ask for forgiveness and be at peace: 'I betrayed you. I betrayed my family. I betrayed Our Lord. Please hear my confession.' Although Kichijiro's actions earlier in the film rather undermine the sacrament (this is his fifth attempt to confess a similar sin), it is a sign of the healing power of confession. (Figure 9.3) The act of confession contains a 'matrix of emotion, fear, anguish. It is this emotional note that gives rise to objectification in discourse; the confession expresses, pushes to the outside, the emotion which without it would be shut up in itself, as an impression of the soul' (Ricoeur 1967: 7). When Kichijiro was hiding under the stairs in the tavern when Rodrigues first met him, he was a fallen man. The sacrament of reconciliation allowed him to live again. Scorsese has commented on his mentor, Fr Principe's view of Mediterranean Catholicism and the beauty is that 'if you fail, and you fall [Korubu], ... you're not damned for life. The idea is, you get up again, and you try your best. And if you fail again, you fail again, and you try your best' (Scorsese 2017a).

As Kichijiro kneels down, the audience hears Rodrigues's interior prayer: 'Lord I have fought against Your silence.' Then the voice of Jesus is heard: 'I suffered beside you. I was never silent.' Placing his hand on Kichijiro's head as a sign of forgiveness, Rodrigues continues his dialogue with Jesus. In tears, he

Figure 9.3 The peace of repentance in *Silence*.

says aloud: 'I know. But even if God had been silent my whole life, to this very day, everything I do, everything I've done speaks of Him. It was in the silence that I heard Your voice.' Given that the original title of the novel was *The Aroma of the Sunshine* or *The Scent of the Sunshine*, Endo has admitted that the title *Silence* might cause confusion: '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' (in Fujimura 2016). Scorsese himself has described *Silence* as 'the story of a man who learns – so painfully – that God's love is more mysterious than he knows, that He leaves much more to the ways of men than we realise, and that He is always present ... even in his silence' (2015: 398).

There are two major examples of silence in the film. At the beginning, when the sounds of nature rise to a crescendo and then are abruptly cut; and at the moment that Rodrigues steps on the *fumi-e* in his act of betrayal, allowing him to finally hear the voice that he believes to be that of Jesus. The second time is the moment of kenosis – an emptying out. The complete silence underlines this act. In a world of sound – sitting in a twenty-first-century cinema where sound is expected – the sudden silence is striking.

In the Good Friday Stations of the Cross in March 2013, Pope Francis said, 'Sometimes it seems that God does not react to evil, as if he is silent. And yet, God has spoken, he has replied, and his answer is the Cross of Christ: a word which is love, mercy, forgiveness' (2013). The novel of *Silence* 'ends with the emptiness or *kenosis* of Jesus who cries out that he came into the world to be trampled on. It ends with the *kenosis* of the priest who, out of compassion and love, empties himself completely' (Johnston 2006: 109). Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that, in *The Divine Comedy*, there is 'the glory of a Heaven aflame with the Eros of God, but the distinctly Christian quality of this – God's descent into death and Hell, his humiliation to the point of complete kenosis, God taking our place and bearing the sin of the whole world – this kind of glory does not come into view' (1986: 101). This is the difference with the suffering Christ in *Silence*.

* * *

In 1667 Kichijiro is discovered to be wearing an amulet containing a religious image, and he is taken away. He maintains that Rodrigues did not give it to him – so there is no final act of betrayal here. Albrecht Dieter reports in voice-over that Rodrigues died and 'never acknowledged a Christian god. Not by word or symbol. He never spoke of Him and never prayed. Not even when he died. The business of his faith was long ended.'

Figure 9.4 The sign of faith in *Silence*.

There are three guards by the coffin – maintaining a tripartite dimension until the end – but Rodrigues's wife is allowed to approach and to place inside a *mamorigatana* to ward off evil spirits. It is also at this point that she slips Mokichi's crucifix into Rodrigues's hands – although the audience is not clear what she has done at this stage. Although her face is impassive and she does not weep, it will later become obvious that there was a secret bond of trust between husband and wife with regard to his religion and that she knew the significance of this symbol of faith.

In the Buddhist ceremony, the coffin is set alight. In voice-over, Albrecht claims that Rodrigues 'ended as they wanted and as I first saw him: lost to God.' There is a close-up of the flames and then the camera passes through the fire and into the interior of the coffin to an extreme close-up of Rodrigues's dead hands in which Mokichi's crucifix glows in the light. (**Figure 9.4**) And Albrecht adds the caveat: 'But as to that, indeed, only God can answer.' Is that the light of the tormenting fires of Hell, the purifying fires of Purgatory or the glory of God in Heaven?

Dante evidently had confidence in the Afterlife: 'I say that of all the stupidities that is the most foolish, the basest, and the most pernicious, which believes that after this life there is no other; for if we turn over all the writings both of the philosophers and the other wise authors, all agree that within us there is a certain part that endures' (in Royal 1999: 69–70). In *The Divine Comedy* his interest lay in where human beings might spend the Afterlife and he had some clear ideas. Where Dante would have placed Rodrigues is an interesting question.