

Portrait of an Unknowingly Ordinary Man:
Endō Shūsaku, Christianity,
and Japanese Historical Consciousness

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Introduction

In many ways, Endō Shūsaku is anything but an ordinary man. He possesses the peculiarity of living as a socially unorthodox and religiously radical minority in a nation of people who strongly value homogeneity and conformity. Endō Shūsaku is a contemporary novelist who lives the somewhat unordinary life of what some consider to be a profound paradox; he is both Catholic and Japanese. Many, both foreigners and native Japanese alike, see being Christian as denying much of what it means to be genuinely Japanese, and view being Japanese as excluding the possibility of being completely Christian. Endō is to some extent an enigma because most of his literary work has been a response to this unordinary situation. Furthermore, by responding publicly, he has become a spokesman of sorts for those who share his dilemma. All of these things combine to render Endō Shūsaku something other than an ordinary man.

Over the course of his career, Endō's response to his historical situation has evolved as the historical condition itself has changed. His early experiences as a convert to Catholicism living in post-war Europe had considerable impact upon his writing. Initially, through the characters and stories of his novels, the majority of his efforts went toward making people aware of the apparent mutual incompatibility and the self denial that he felt in being a Japanese Christian. His aim was to clarify the supposedly irreconcilable differences between Japanese and Western religious sensibilities. His arguments centered around the Japanese propensity to change

everything they adopt from abroad, conflicts between European and Japanese understanding and experience of sin, and the Japanese inability to comprehend an absolute, transcendent and yet loving, father image of God. Eventually, Endō brought his Catholicism home to Japan, and his emphasis self-consciously shifted away from informing others about the problems associated with cultural incompatibility to finding a means to resolve the conflicts. This evolution of Endō's approach signifies a newly awakened historical consciousness. In other words, Endō discovered his historicity or the need to find and make meaning in the present world he inhabits by reconciling it with his own particular past.

From the larger perspective, the conflicts that arise in reconciling one's past with one's present are quite ordinary; ultimately, virtually everyone is faced with this task. For some, like the culturally and historically homogeneous Japanese, this reconciliation may be unconscious because the past and the present can become fused in today's tradition and the conflicts concealed beneath contemporary cultural continuity. If, in his Japanese world, Endō were an entirely ordinary man, he might have avoided the specific conflicts and consequential attempts at resolution that his life has represented. In such a case, he may never have gained any awareness of his historicity at all. However, because he is faced with being different and out of the ordinary in his Japanese world, his appropriation of his own past has been raised to a level of self consciousness.

The sense of isolation within his own culture has prompted Endō and many others to conclude that Japanese Christians are alone and unique in having to deal with the dilemma of historicity. The inclination to see himself as unique in the world is aggravated by his historical conditioning. Notwithstanding Endō's confrontation with pluralism, the presumptions underlying his efforts to show the differences between East and West have prevented him from completing his historical consciousness and realizing that no one in the world can escape their own historical grounding and the need to find meaning in the present. Endō's blindness to the fact that the rest of the world participates in his historical dilemma is a result of the fact that he is grounded in Japanese culture. In particular, Endō's analysis has been tainted by the collective myth¹ of Japanese uniqueness or *nihonron*.² Consequently, in spite of the partial realization of his histori-

¹ I use the word "myth" not in the religious studies term-of-art sense referring to a narrative, but in the popular pejorative sense meaning something that is uncritically held to be true which is actually false.

² For a discussion of an entire genre of Japanese literature devoted to extolling Japanese uniqueness, see DAVIS 1983, p. 213.

city, he has consistently failed to see from the vantage point of the larger perspective from which he is, although unknowingly, no more and no less than an ordinary man.

For religious studies, Endō's response to his religious environment makes his work significant, not necessarily for what he says about his religion, but certainly for the meaning of what he says as a religious event. When viewed in terms of being a religious phenomenon in response to a changing pluralistic situation, Endō's way of dealing with his circumstances is a significant manifestation of the Japanese historical consciousness. Studying what Endō has said, and understanding how he perceives himself historically, afford us considerable insight into the nature of the conflicts implicit in being both Japanese and Christian, the Japanese attempt to resolve these conflicts, and how the Japanese in general view themselves in terms of such conflicts and resolutions.

Lost Innocence

Endō Shūsaku was born in Tokyo in 1923. As a three year old child he lived for a short time in Manchuria, but soon returned to Japan with his divorced mother to live with her sister who was Christian (ENDŌ 1973, p.3). At the age of 11, without considerable personal investigation, Endō submitted to the wishes of his mother and aunt and was baptized a Catholic with the Christian name of Paul (ENDŌ 1978, intro. p. 5). In a frequently quoted comment made later in his adult life, Endō describes how his youthful conversion to Christianity affected his literary efforts, and practically gives an outline of his entire literary career.

I received baptism when I was a child . . . in other words, my Catholicism was a kind of ready-made suit. . . . I had to decide either to make this ready made suit fit my body or get rid of it and find another suit that fitted. . . . There were many times when I felt I wanted to get rid of my Catholicism, but I was finally unable to do so. It is not just that I did not throw it off, but that I was unable to throw it off. The reason for this must be that it had become a part of me after all. The fact that it had penetrated me so deeply in my youth was a sign, I thought, that it had, in part at least, become coexistent with me. Still, there was always the feeling in my heart that it was something borrowed, and I began to wonder what my real self was like. This I think is the 'mud swamp' Japanese in me. From the time I first began to write novels even to this present day, this confrontation of my Catholic self with the self that lies underneath has, like an idiot's constant refrain, echoed and reechoed in my

work. I felt that I had to in some way reconcile the two (Endō 1969, p. 13).

Endō was a small and sickly child, and grew up to be a small and sickly adult. He was eighteen years old when the United States entered World War II. Japan had already been at war for some time, and Endō grew to adulthood as a Christian in a non-Christian nation at war with the Christian west. He was able to avoid the draft on account of his poor health, but served briefly in the civilian war service. Near the end of the war Endō entered Waseda University as a pre-med student, but finally graduated from Keio University in French literature instead (ENDŌ 1972, p. 1). In 1950 he left for France as the very first Japanese to study abroad since the war. Near the end of his three year study period in France, he was hospitalized and eventually had to return home severely ill to undergo two more hospitalizations and serious surgery (ENDŌ 1973, p. 3).

Like a child that had stepped unsuspecting into adulthood where all pretensions of innocence are shattered, Endō's early writings are symptomatic of the conflicts brought about by his coming of age in Europe. His writing reflects that he was somewhat immune from concern over Japanese loss or victory in the war; he felt no particular personal setback with Japan's defeat. Endō went to France as a Christian going to a Christian country, with the assumption that he would find at least as much congruity for himself there as he did being a Christian in Japan—a non-Christian country. What he found instead was frustration. The open pluralistic society of Europe was incomprehensible from a perspective shaped in isolated and homogeneous pre-war Japan. Endō was surprised to find European culture so alien and inaccessible. Because he had identified his Christianity with European culture, Endō was not prepared to find it so diverse and difficult to appropriate. The mutual lack of understanding between himself and Europeans greatly aggravated the intensity of his internal conflict over being a Japanese Christian.

Endō was forever altered by the internal turmoil awakened within him in the West. From the time of his return from Europe, Endō's work has dealt with the conflicts he felt from being both Japanese and Christian, and from his inability to completely enter European culture. He has been preoccupied with apostates, foreigners, unfeeling Japanese, and renegade priests. Such characters are construed in almost every story he has written. Even though Endō's Christianity facilitated his first venture into a more pluralistic world, something which many of his countrymen continue to avoid, his essential "Japaneseness" hindered a complete entry.

Unwanted Alternatives: Alienation or Appropriation

Nowhere does Endō develop more clearly the idea of Japanese alienation from European culture and reveal so much of how his early travels affected him than in his autobiographical work *Ryūgaku* 留学 (*Study Abroad*). Chronologically this book does not appear until the middle of his career, but in it he supplies us with a look at how his experiences in Europe had deeply affected him. This story is about a Japanese student of French literature living in post-war France. At first, the student, Tanaka, is enamored with “the river” of European culture and tries to drink it all in. However, he soon becomes discouraged and alienated when he is unable to adequately absorb or even understand it. His discouragement leads to serious illness, and eventually his spiritual and physical disillusionment reaches a climax when both he and his friend are hospitalized for tuberculosis. The comment made to Tanaka by his friend characterizes their dilemma:

It isn't surprising that I should be worn down, since I tried to make my own in one or two years the culture that this country had taken two thousand years to build up. Though I knew from the beginning that it was impossible, I set out with nerves taut as a bow to see everything, to overlook nothing. Tanaka, this illness is the pitiful outcome of losing my fight with this country (JANEIRA 1970, pp. 201–202).

Perhaps one of the most insightful passages in the book is the following one which reflects deeply Endō's attitude toward the relationship between Japanese Christianity and “the stream” of European culture.

My one wish was not to be like so many Japanese scholars abroad who, like petty thieves, make off with only a portion of the stream and thus proceed to imitate it with their own meager talents. I thought that unless I succeeded in forcing into confrontation the essential nature of this river and the Japanese in me, the whole meaning of coming to France would be lost (1970, pp. 201–202).

These passages reveal some of the reasons behind the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of Endō unwillingness to accept the inevitable changes that come to Christianity by its growing in Japanese soil, and his later desire to make Christianity into something genuinely Japanese. Endō did not want just a poorly done imitation of something European. He either wanted to possess and embrace Christianity completely in an unchanged form, or he wanted to force a confrontation between the foreign and the Japanese within himself in order to yield something genuinely Japanese and not foreign at all. All of his writings can be interpreted as either a

complaint that he could not do the former, or an attempt to do the latter.

At first, his novels were a kind of nihilistic lament that the ready made suit of European Christianity did not fit his Japanese body. Endō built his early stories around Japanese and foreign characters who epitomized his own personal conflict in order to show the vast differences between Japanese and Western sensibilities. In his early books, Christianity was either rejected outright by the Japanese, or in the guise of acceptance, unknowingly changed into something other than what its propagators intended. Both of these were serious problems to Endō. Even when his early works did not deal directly with Christianity, he wrote to show the Japanese inability to understand or appreciate certain Western Christian sensibilities. He considered this to be one of the main reasons for Christianity's meager and short lived success in Japan. He was eager to argue vicariously through his characters that the Japanese were culturally and historically different to such an extent that they were incapable of comprehending and adopting Christianity in the same way that Europeans do. In these early works his goal was to explicate precisely how the ready made suit of Christianity did not fit a Japanese body, and what kind of changes were unconsciously being made by the Japanese to make it fit.

Endō's great concern over the differences between European and Japanese Christianity is the first inkling of his historical consciousness. In his realization that it is impossible for him to completely comprehend an unaltered form of European Christianity, Endō recognized that his own Christianity was conditioned by his particular historical perspective. Endō has always been troubled by his historicity, and was long unwilling to accept it. When he tried to absorb the European culture which he had identified with his Christianity, he found that it was inaccessible to him because he did not share its historical roots. But because he did not want just a cheap copy of the European version, he resisted any historically grounded Japanese Christianity, and felt as if the only Christianity that he was capable of participating in was somehow tainted and/or less than the Christianity that foreigners possessed. Eventually he realized that he was unable to escape his historically conditioned self, and began on the course that would lead him to recognize that his own Christianity must become meaningful to that self within him which is inescapably Japanese, or it would not be meaningful at all.³

³ This raises the theological question of whether Christianity is truly universal and hence authoritative. It also brings up the issue of how completely any religion can be translated into different languages and cultures and the question of to what degree cultural transformation is implicit in genuine conversion to a foreign religion.

Sin and Society

His first novel *Shiroi hito* 白い人 (*White Man*), which was written after his return from France and won the Akutagawa prize in 1955 (Janeira 1970, p. 201), and its sequel or partner novel, *Kiiroi hito* 黄色い人 (*Yellow Man*), which he wrote the following year, both deal with the vast and apparently irreconcilable differences between “white” and “yellow” sensibilities. The conflicts in these works center around members from each culture: a non-practicing Catholic Japanese, and an apostate French priest in Japan, who have both “sinned” (ENDŌ 1972, p. 3). Endō employs these characters to show his perception of the vast differences in Japanese and European attitudes toward sin and the experience of guilt. At one point Chiba, the Japanese character says:

A yellow man like me has absolutely no experience of anything so profound and extreme as the consciousness of sin you white men have. All we experience is fatigue, a deep fatigue—a weariness murky as the color of my skin, dank, heavily submerged (ENDŌ 1974, pp. 6–7).

This passage reveals not only a conviction that the Japanese cannot experience genuine guilt for sin, and consequently Christianity as Europeans do, but also a certain alienation from the white races of Europe in general that Endō probably felt in his first travels to the West.

Elsewhere he gives a more openly analytical insight into the Japanese attitude toward sin. In *Shūkyō to bungaku* 宗教と文学 (*Religion and Literature*), a non-fiction work, Endō explains that “the Japanese consider sin an act against social contract and aesthetic harmony,” not as we presume in the West, a violation of some universal God given or natural moral law (JANEIRA 1970, p. 356). Endō argues that, because of the historical background of Japanese religious sensibilities, which are firmly rooted in Shinto and Buddhist traditions, they are categorically incompatible with European thought. In spite of the fact that his motive is to show how different Japanese and Europeans are, in undertaking such a task he demonstrates an awareness that his historical particularity is an inescapable fact which he must eventually reckon with. He felt that Japan has no historical background or cultural orientation on which he as a Christian could base his religious experience. It is this infant historical consciousness that goads Endō into recognizing that the Japanese and European peoples think of and experience sin differently.

Endō struggles to some degree with his perceived absence of guilt over sin in the Japanese throughout all his writing. However, nowhere is this

conflict more poignant and powerfully presented than in *The Sea and Poison*. This novel centers around a young Japanese doctor who was involved in lethal medical experiments performed on captured American pilots near the end of the war. In spite of the fact that he had agreed to it beforehand, when it came time to perform the surgery the young doctor was unable to actually go through with his role in the experiment. Through the guilt ridden doctor's thoughts as he leans against the wall and feels the angry and accusing looks from others in the room, Endō gives us insight into the denial of his "Japaneseness" that backing out of the experiment constituted for the doctor.

"What's the matter with you, afraid?" those eyes asked. "How can a Japanese be so weak?"

He writhed under the officer's stare, aware of what he seemed: a doctor unable to carry out his duties.

The young doctor felt morally derelict because he failed in his socially contracted duty, in spite of the fact that he did so because he could not bring himself to kill another human being. When this young doctor complains to Dr. Toda, a colleague who also participated in the experiment, that someday they would have to answer for their actions Toda replies:

"Answer for it? To society? If it's only to society, it's nothing much to get worked up about." Toda gave another obvious yawn. "You and I happened to be here in this particular hospital in this particular era, and so we took part in a vivisection performed on a prisoner. If those people who are going to judge us had been put in the same situation, would they have done any different? So much for the punishments of society."

Toda felt an indescribable sense of weariness and stopped talking (ENDŌ 1972, pp. 166–167).

In this passage, which is strongly reminiscent of the "yellow man's" complaint that he felt only fatigue in the place of guilt, the message we get is that any Japanese would have done the same thing as a matter of social duty; and consequently, most would have no particular reason to feel bad or guilty about doing it. Endō feels certain that any European would feel deeply guilty over such an atrocity, and ascribes this feeling to his European characters like the apostate French priest Duran who appears in both *Study Abroad* and *Volcano*. Likewise, he is convinced that, generally, the Japanese would not and could not feel that way. In his eyes the Christian suit of moral consciousness does not, and can not be made to, fit the Japanese.

The underlying irony of Endō's complaint is that it is self denying and ultimately proves his assertions at least partially wrong. Endō feels guilty over the apparent Japanese inability to feel guilty. Obviously, in spite of his complaints to the contrary, Endō and the Japanese must have some sense of what guilt is because both he and his Japanese characters experience it. Endō correctly observed that Europeans and the Japanese experience guilt differently, but in emphasizing too strongly the differences between the experiences, Endō inadvertently ignored or obscured the similarities. Endō must have had a subliminal sense of this incongruity in his observations because the focus of his works gradually shifted to compensate for it.

Foreign Christ Figures

His novels *Wonderful Fool* and *Volcano*, which were written at the same time, both show evidence of subtle changes beginning to appear in Endō's attitude toward Christianity in Japan. He approaches the differences between Japanese and Western sensibilities in a little different manner, and introduces a new character type that plays an important role in much of his later material: the Christ figure. In these books, Endō retains his conviction that the Japanese inability to feel genuinely guilty and their obtuseness toward self sacrificing love is a barrier to understanding Christianity, and is a source of alienation between Japanese and Europeans. But he also displays the beginning of his realization that Christianity had become a part of himself, and was there whether or not he wanted it or knew it. He also begins to show a growing conviction that the locus of genuine Christianity is not necessarily in either European culture or the Catholic Church.

Wonderful Fool centers around a weak, unattractive, ineffectual, and simpleminded individual who loves unconditionally, but is constantly abused by those he loves. Endō chose a foreigner to be his first Christ figure for the probable reason that he felt like the unconditional love his Christ figure must possess was more European than Japanese. He still wanted to show that love and Christianity are a part of the vast incongruities between Western and Japanese sensibilities. Through his wonderful foreign fool, who is a puzzle to his Japanese hosts, Endō deals with the Japanese inability to understand the motives of a person inspired by nothing other than love. It was not until he opened up the possible resolution to his nihilistic lament in the later novel *Silence* that he employs Japanese Christ figures. At this point for Endō, Christ and his love are still some-

thing beyond the Japanese ability to fully comprehend.

Volcano is a highly symbolic work that deals with the love of God (the volcano) which looms unavoidably on the horizon, but which is somehow still mysterious and misunderstood even by those who appreciate and comprehend it best. While all the characters in the story make predictions about the volcano's behavior, and make plans to exploit it for their own limited purposes, none of them really understand it. The volcano eventually upsets all their predictions and designs. Even the priest's well intended refuge for the Japanese Christians at the foot of the mountain, which he was certain would be protected by God, ends up being destroyed. In this respect, *Volcano* is a metaphor for the history and experience of Catholicism in Japan. The love of God is something now subtly portrayed as not only beyond the comprehension of the Japanese, but also the Catholic Church. Endō displays a growing dissatisfaction with institutional religion that becomes even more evident in his later works. His choice to express such ideas in a symbolic form is probably a result of more than just the fact that symbolism and metaphor are the media of his profession. Such a symbolic expression is one that will reach the Japanese because it is framed in their own terms, and also one that will avoid attention as a direct criticism of the Church.

Into the "Mud Swamp"

Both the apex of his conflict between East/West sensibilities and Endō's way to its resolution are found in his book *Silence*, and in the play *The Golden Country*. These books contain all of the elements of the conflict that Endō has struggled with in his previous works. They also include the first indication of Endō's recognition that there may be a resolution to his situation. In these two works Endō abandoned the metaphor of *Volcano* and wove his social commentary into fictionalized accounts of real events surrounding the Christian persecution and proscription that took place in 17th century Japan.

In the first, two young Jesuit priests make their way to Japan, in spite of the intense persecution and the rumors of mass apostasy. It is the firm aspiration of both men to help the few remaining Japanese Christians in their plight. One of the priests, Sebastian Rodrigues, is also determined to redeem his fallen teacher Ferreira who had apostatized after years of missionary labor in Japan. After arriving, the priests' efforts meet only with disaster as the Christians they want to help suffer because of their presence. Rodrigues witnesses the other priest's death in an attempt to save a few

Christian peasants, and suffers a crisis of faith when his former teacher Ferreira not only rejects his arguments, but also aids the inquisitor Inoue in his interrogation. The apostate Ferreira becomes a metaphor for Japanese Christianity which, although European in origin and in spite of the years of labor by the Church, had “apostatized” or strayed from European norms and orthodoxy. This sets the stage for Endō to both bring the difficulties that arise from the presence of Christianity on Japanese soil into clear focus, and to offer a possible way out of the dilemma.

Christianity is condemned by both the Japanese interrogators and the foreign apostate alike as something completely inadequate to the “mud swamp” of Japan. They assert that Christianity simply cannot grow in Japanese soil because its roots will inevitably rot away. Their contention is that because Japan is a “mud swamp,” even when Christianity is not fully rejected by the Japanese, they will none the less, in the guise of acceptance change it into something other than what the foreign priests intended. Most Japanese feel no particular guilt when they apostasize, only practical expediency. And the Church with its father image of God and foreign priests, is something totally alien to Japan. Reflecting a motive based on practical political aims, they conclude with the argument that to Japan, Christianity is so utterly useless, and that the Japanese are so set in their ways, that it must unavoidably fail. The bottom line is that in spite of and/or because of its European origin, Christianity in Japan will either be rejected or modified into something Japanese; either way the European aim of converting the Japanese will be frustrated.

Because of the great time and energy that Endō devotes to unpacking, understanding, and overcoming these issues, they are certainly conclusions that he came to himself in his own confrontation with his dual Japanese and Christian heritage. However, even though these were his own conclusions, he has always struggled with them and tried to avoid them. In his early career, Endō was convinced that because of the vast differences in religious sensibilities, Christianity could not succeed in Japan. To Endō the Japanese are so radically different from Europeans that Japanese Christianity could be only a mockery of the European version with its great and lengthy history. This conclusion persists in all his works even after *Silence*. However, in this book he comes to grips with the fact that not only are changes unavoidable, but that they are also preferable. Thus, he finds a painful and reluctant resolution to his unwanted conclusions. The intensity and anguish of the argument and circumstances in Endō’s writing surrounding this resolution attest to the difficulty with which he reached it.

Reconciliation and "The Pit"

When Rodrigues is brought to his final test, in a way that seems strangely appropriate for Japan, he keeps his faith by denying it, and articulates Endō's solution to his own dilemma. In order to save a few suffering Christians who are hanging in the dreaded "pit," Rodrigues, who was determined to rekindle the faith of his former teacher, takes to heart his apostate teacher's argument: "For love Christ would have apostatized. Even if it meant giving up everything he had." So when he is brought to choose between keeping his faith and easing the suffering of others, he hears the sacred image of Christ, which he must step on to signal his apostasy, tell him to do exactly that which he was most determined not to do.

Trample! Trample! I more than anyone else know 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 (ENDŌ 1969, pp. 269–271).

The image told the priest that the only way he could be genuinely Christian was to apostatize. Endō comes to the extraordinary conclusion that, in spite of how painful it was, apostasy was the only way for the priest to break the silence of God and actualize his love in this world. It would have been more of a denial of his faith for the priest not to save the suffering peasants by refusing to symbolically desecrate that which he loved the most.⁴ This conflict and its paradoxical resolution is nearly identical to Endō's own determination to assimilate an unaltered form of European Christianity; in the end he could only keep his faith by giving up the goal to make it retain its European shape. Endō's own revelation was that he must step on the holy image of the Church and European culture, and make the ready made suit of Christianity, which he had inherited, fit his own body.

Thus in the final hour, God was not silent for either the priest nor Endō; he spoke to tell the priest that, even if it meant the ultimate sacrifice of giving up his most valued possession, he must keep his faith by loving enough to understand and alleviate the suffering of others. For Endō, God spoke to say that sacrificing, even what is cherished above all, in an act of love, is the true and essential message of the Christian faith.

In this conclusion Endō makes his first attempt at grounding his faith in his own history. He gives meaning to his own cultural history in the suffering and apostasy of the early Japanese Christians, and he identifies their

⁴ This is not without theological precedent, most notably Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac which was a type for God's eventual sacrifice of the Only Begotten Son.

actions as important precedents for the way in which he must solve his present day conflicts. He gives up his former resolution to find and keep an untainted European faith, and submits to his historicity. From this point on, Endō's emphasis shifts from complaining that the Japanese simply cannot understand Christianity, to identifying the love which he feels is essential to Christianity within the range of Japanese history and experience.

Bringing Christ Home to Japan

One of the first steps to bringing Christian sensibilities within range of Japanese comprehension and experience is to re-interpret the central symbol of the Christian faith, Jesus Christ, according to Japanese values. Endō directly takes on this task, which is not an easy one for him, in the non-fiction book *A Life of Jesus*. For the religious historian the book has little if anything new to add to what is actually known about Jesus; but it constitutes a significant religious phenomenon because it openly and self consciously seeks to re-appraise Jesus in Japanese terms.

A Life of Jesus represents a significant turning point in Endō's literary career. Up until this book he had been primarily occupied with demonstrating the incompatibilities of Western and Eastern religious sensibilities. In this book he retreats from that position slightly, and in spite of his previous convictions of inescapable irreconcilability between the two, he re-presents a portion of his Christian faith in such a way as to illuminate its compatibility with his Japanese self. There is an ironic twist in this equaled only by his earlier and frequently expressed guilt over not feeling guilty. Where he was once bothered by the fact that Japanese Christianity can be no more than a meager replica of the European version, now he is determined to at least move that issue to the back burner, and make Christianity into something as totally Japanese as possible. His own comment on the nature and difficulty of this switch in attitude is illuminating:

For a long time I was attracted to a meaningless nihilism and when I finally came to realize the fearfulness of such a void I was struck once again by the grandeur of the Catholic faith. This problem of the reconciliation of my Catholicism with my Japanese blood . . . has taught me one thing: that is that the Japanese must absorb Christianity without support of a Christian tradition or history or legacy or sensibility. Even if this attempt is the occasion of much resistance and anguish and pain, still it is impossible to counter by closing one's eyes to the difficulties. No doubt this is the particular cross that God gave to the Japanese (JANEIRA 1970, pp. 205–206; ENDŌ 1969, p. 14).

Finally, in this statement, Endō comes to terms with his inability to throw off his Christianity and recognizes that it had become a part of him. He recognized that Christianity is a part of his own historical heritage from which he could not escape. His historical consciousness expanded to the point where he realized that he must self consciously appropriate his own history, and make it meaningful in his own life. This is the enterprise he undertook by re-interpreting Christianity in such a way that is comprehensible to his Japanese countrymen. In the "Preface to the American Edition" he makes this comment about his motives and purposes for writing *A Life of Jesus*:

I wrote this book for the benefit of Japanese readers who have no Christian tradition of their own and who know almost nothing about Jesus. What is more, I was determined to highlight the particular aspect of love in his personality precisely in order to make Jesus understandable in terms of the religious psychology of my non-Christian countrymen and thus demonstrate that *Jesus is not alien to their religious sensibilities* (ENDŌ 1973, p. 1, emphasis added).

Endō is painfully aware of the fact that he is historically grounded. *A Life of Jesus* is one of his first attempts to actually resolve the conflicts he feels because of his historicity.

Among the major religious sensibilities that Endō seeks to identify with both his Christian and his Japanese history is the self sacrificing love of a mother. He argues that the father image of God is essentially alienating to Japanese who traditionally fear only fires, earth quakes, and thunder more than they do fathers (Endō 1973, p. 4). He identifies love as the essential element of Christianity regardless of cultural bounds, and that it is something with which the Japanese already possess something in common. In terms Endō might use himself, he is trying to communicate, in a way the Japanese will understand, the revelation that Rodrigues received before his apostasy: Christ is the one who loves all, perfectly and unconditionally, and this is what he requires of those who follow him. He gives special emphasis to his particular interpretations of Jesus' love for those around him. Endō wants to make it clear that self sacrificing love is something which the Japanese have cultural and historical precedents to help them understand.

This new direction is directly counter to Endō's prior arguments regarding the inability of the Japanese to understand or experience Christian love. Endō apparently changed his mind about Japanese obtuseness towards self sacrificing love when he was able to locate analogous experi-

ences in his own culture. At the close of the work, Endō makes a comment that gives us insight into how the decision to bring Jesus to Japan, so to speak, has subsequently affected his writing:

I think that in my remaining lifetime I would like to write once more my life of Jesus, writing it from my own further accumulation of life experience. And when I finish it, I still shall not have rid myself of the urge to take up my writing brush for yet another life of Jesus (ENDŌ 1973, p. 179).

Bringing Japan Home to Christ

The two novels that chronologically follow *A Life of Jesus* characterize this desire perfectly. They are works that further seek to bring within the Japanese range of experience and understanding the unconditional love which Jesus had, and which is central to Endō's Christianity. The books *When I Whistle* and *The Samurai* both deal almost exclusively with Christ figures that are not only Japanese, but are tied up in the Japanese collective cultural/historical experience and memory. In these books, he employed the same kind of characters and conflicts as earlier in his career to reinterpret the essentially Western Christian tradition into something meaningful to the Japanese. Endō does not completely abandon his previous opinion that the Japanese do not readily understand Christian sensibilities; both stories are replete with examples of where the Japanese are extremely insensitive and lacking in appreciation for the love manifest by his Christ figures. But in terms of making the Christ figures comprehensible to the Japanese, these two books complete the circle of bringing Endō's Christian sensibilities within reach of his Japanese self.

When I Whistle is a story about a Japanese youth, who unconditionally loved someone for his entire life, and ended up bringing something good into the lives of the ones he touched with his love, even after his death. Like Endō's other Christ figures, the boy, named Flatfish, is simple minded, smelly, and weak — a sorry clown that is by most worldly standards an undesirable person. He suffers often as a consequence of his unconditional love; and he eventually gives his life in a final act of duty and love for his country. One of the most significant things about this Christ figure is that he is totally Japanese. If Endō did not have a literary history within which the book could be interpreted, it might not be suspected of having anything particular to do with Christianity at all. In his short life, Flatfish is caught up in all the things that are familiar and real to the Japanese. He goes to school; he gets in fights; he has an unfulfilled love; he gets a job;

and he finally goes to war where he dies an obscure death, all things which are familiar to Endō's generation of Japanese. Flatfish, the absurd character of the story, is the first of Endō's Christ figures to fit totally within the realm of Japanese experience.

Endō's latest work *The Samurai* is probably the crowning masterpiece of his literary career and the apex of the struggle with his dual Christian and Japanese heritage. He brings all of the character types and elements of his former conflicts between being Japanese and being Christian together in a totally Japanese drama of grand scale and historical significance. The story is, to a large extent, a true one. And although much of it takes place in foreign lands, the primary participants are Japanese, and the events they are involved in are historically significant to both the Japanese in general and especially to Japanese Christians. In *The Samurai*, Endō finds a metaphor or expression for the love that he values in Christianity which is totally and completely within the Japanese cultural and historical milieu.

The samurai of the story is an obscure country-born man who lived and gave his life according to the Japanese ideal of complete and unfailing loyalty to his liege lord. His greatest desire was to be with his family and work the land where he was born, along with the peasant families in his charge. But instead, he is sent as an emissary of his lord across the ocean with a special mission to fulfill. On his journey he encounters time and time again the strange Christianity which is so alien to his understanding. In reference to the icons and statues that always decorated the walls of the many monasteries where they stayed the samurai thought:

This ugly, emaciated man. This man devoid of majesty, bereft of outward beauty, so wretchedly miserable. A man who exists only to be discarded after he has been used. A man born in a land I have never seen, and who died in a distant past. He has nothing to do with me, thought the samurai (ENDŌ 1982, 167).

The samurai was continually confronted with all of the reasons why, as a Japanese, not to become a Christian. And yet, at the same time, he was under extreme pressure to convert in order to make his mission a success. Eventually, and only after months of agonizing indecision, in the course of giving his all to fulfill his commission and out of loyalty to his lord, the samurai chooses to go through the formality of becoming Christian. In spite of this, in the end his mission was a failure and even the Church refused to intercede and help. The samurai had no choice but to return home after years of difficult travel as a failure.

In this account Endō reveals considerable discontent with the Church

and institutional religion along with its formal rules and open self interest. One dialogue between the Franciscan priest who accompanied the samurai and his companions on their journey, and a Cardinal in Rome who refused to assist the samurai, gives insight into this event and some of Endō's underlying resentment.

"Those believers [the Japanese] . . . no longer have a Church. There are no missionaries to encourage them. . . Aren't they now like the one lamb separated from the flock of which the Bible speaks?"

"If in searching for the one lamb the other sheep are exposed to danger . . .," the Cardinal said sadly, "the shepherd has no choice but to abandon the lamb. It cannot be helped if one is to protect the organization."

"That reminds me of the words of the High Priest Caiaphas when the Lord was killed. To save an entire nation, there is no choice but to sacrifice a single man. Those are the words Caiaphas spoke."

. . . "That is true. . . I do not wish to concur with the high priest Caiaphas's remarks. But at the same time the Lord did not direct an organization, while Caiaphas did. Those who run organizations, like Caiaphas will always say—to protect the majority, we have no choice but to abandon the one. Even we who believe in the Lord place ourselves in the same position as the High priest Caiaphas from the moment we create religious orders and set up organizations. . . . I have no choice but to adopt Caiaphas's attitude towards the faithful in Japan" (ENDŌ 1982, p. 193).

When the Church was compelled to withdraw from Japan, it abandoned the faithful and faltering Christians alike to face their fate alone. When the samurai returned from his long and arduous journey in the service of his lord, he too was abandoned by the ones he sought to serve. During the samurai's long absence, the political climate had changed significantly. When he came home, not only was his mission a failure, but it had been aborted by those who had sent him. His return was somewhat of a surprise, and more of a problem to the government than anything else. His entire sacrifice had been for nothing. And then, in an act which only emphasized the futility of it all, the samurai is taken by those for whom he had done the very act out of loyalty, and executed because he had converted to Christianity. In the final exchange of words between the samurai and his one trusted friend, the meaning of the ugly and undesirable man comes to light, and the samurai finds comfort in the one who suffers with him and

understands his pain better than any other. After a lengthy journey abroad in Endō's writing, the self sacrificing love of Christ and his suffering for mankind, finally find a home in the culture and history of Japan. Endō discovers a cultural analogue to the unconditional love of Christ in the unconditional loyalty and devotion of the samurai and his ultimate personal and spiritual sacrifice.

So in the end, in spite of his early fears, Endō's Christianity ultimately has historical roots and cultural precedent in Japan. The dominant symbol of Endō's Christianity is the weak, ugly, self sacrificing and unconditionally loving Christ: the one who, more perfectly than any other, can comfort and understand mankind's suffering; the one who gives everything for the sake of love. Endō's Christ is anyone who makes that kind of sacrifice, from the strange foreigner, to the love struck school boy, and finally to the loyal samurai. Endō's faith is not found in the graven image of self interested bureaucratic pronouncement and policy, nor are its roots in some alien culture; it is evident in the yearnings of those who suffer; it is found in the acts of those who love without wanting or expecting anything in return. These are things which, however difficult, are not beyond the range of experience and expression for the Japanese. They are a part of the Japanese world. Thus, in the end, Endō has made his Christian suit fit his Japanese body.

Historical Perspectives

The dawn of Endō's historical consciousness began when he realized the impossibility of quickly absorbing the entire Western culture that had taken millennia to build. It was refined when he began to identify some of the historically and culturally grounded differences between Western and Eastern sensibilities. It grew more clear when he accepted the need to self-consciously appropriate his own historical heritage. And it bore fruit when he actually began doing so. Endō has displayed a considerable level of historical consciousness in his recognition and appropriation of his own historicity. But, in spite of all this, there is one level of historical awareness that Endō and many other Japanese have consistently failed to achieve.

Regardless of how greatly he has developed a consciousness of his own historically grounded condition, Endō falls short of the realization that in being historically grounded, he is very much the same as everyone else in the world. His conviction that the Japanese are the only ones who are required to appropriate their own history is clearly evidenced in the above quoted passage: "No doubt this is the particular cross that God gave to the

Japanese" (JANEIRA 1970, p. 356). Because many Japanese and Western sensibilities are different, it only followed for Endō to conclude that Christianity not only inescapably will, but also must be placed in Japanese frames of reference to be meaningful to Japanese. Endō reluctantly came to acknowledge the inevitability and necessity of the Japanese propensity to change what they adopt from abroad, and self consciously invested his efforts in helping that process along. However, in bringing this about, Endō has persisted with the assumptions implicit in his early efforts and unwittingly failed to see that the rest of the world, Christian and non-Christian alike, has always been involved in essentially the same kind of activity. Endō has allowed the differences between East and West to prevent him from seeing the similarities.

If Endō had been able to complete his historical consciousness, he would have recognized that the Japanese are not the only ones to change Christianity and other things adopted from abroad into something different from their originals. Every time Christianity crosses any cultural or linguistic boundary it is changed. Any time it passes from one generation to another it is changed. Anyone who knows anything about it only understands Christianity in terms that are meaningful to them in their own historically rooted situation. And this is not true of just Christianity; it happens with all religions, and all peoples, in all times, and in all places. To realize this is to take historical consciousness that one step further which Endō has not been able to do. If he had, he would not have been so concerned about his "mud swamp" Japan. He would have realized that what he saw going on with Christianity in Japan was an utterly non-unique phenomenon. He would have recognized that it would be far more appropriate to speak more broadly of a "mud swamp" world, and not limit the analogy to Japan. His own historical grounding in Japanese culture prevented Endō from consummating his historical consciousness and recognizing that his condition is shared by all the world.

In his failure to see what he shares with the Western world, Endō is witnessing loudly to just how culturally grounded he actually is. His assertion that the Japanese, out of all other peoples in the world, are the unique possessors of some problem is strong evidence that he has been greatly affected by the Japanese myth of uniqueness. In spite of Japan's entry into modernity, the Japanese have remained a people who are largely isolated from any direct personal contact with cultures and histories significantly different from their own. Consequently, they have avoided the kind of historical awareness that results from being immediately confronted with a radically pluralistic and diverse society. Endō is, in part, an exception to

this because of his personal contacts and conflicts with foreign culture and history. However, his confrontations only lasted long enough to convince him of certain irreconcilable differences between foreign and domestic Japanese sensibilities, and that he must ground his faith in his own culture and history. After that he turned back to his own culture and history and was prevented from recognizing that the rest of the world is engaged in basically the same struggle.

The difficulties that arise from the Japanese conviction of their own uniqueness are compounded when Endō concludes that because of certain historical and cultural orientations the Western world and Japan are forever beyond the reach of each other's understanding. He thinks that the differences between the Japanese and the West are so vast that they cannot be reconciled. He concludes that, because of the way in which his historical situation has conditioned him, Western sensibilities are forever unavailable to him.

Ironically, Endō finds the solution to his conflicts within a context of cross-cultural comparison. It is the foreign apostate who first suggests that the faith can only be kept by denying the Christ. However, even when he realizes, for example, that the Church is historically grounded in terms of the care and preservation of its institutions as he does in *The Samurai*, Endō does not extend to them the acknowledgment that they also must make their past and present meaningful in terms of each other. In the end, the Church's betrayal of the believers in Japan is parallel to Endō's paradox of keeping his faith by apostatizing. Each must sacrifice its most highly valued possession in the service of its particular god. However, Endō is blinded to his common struggle with the rest of humanity by the Japanese myth of uniqueness.

The Japanese myth of uniqueness fails to take some very important things into account. We in the West are not dead; we are present with them in the same world. Endō and the Japanese are less separated from Western ideas than any of us are from our own past. At least people who hold Western sensibilities are available to be experienced, interacted with, and engaged in dialogue. But there is an insurmountable obstacle in the way of anyone accessing their own past. We have surely inherited a few relics, both tangible and intangible: governments, traditions, books, other people, memories, language, values, and presuppositions about the nature of reality. These both unavoidably shape us and give us clues about the nature of our histories. But we can never actually go into the past. The past is forever unavailable to our experience. Our understanding of the distant past is necessarily more an intuitive result of being shaped by it

than any actual participation within it. Members of dissimilar cultures, however, can interact meaningfully by virtue of their immediate availability to experience. Contrary to Endō's convictions, mutual understanding between members of the same present world is probably much more likely, because they are mutually accessible.

In spite of the vast differences that may or may not exist between East and West, the necessity to appropriate one's history is not unique to the Japanese; no one understands anything except in terms of their own historical and cultural background. It is equally required of Europeans and Americans to appropriate their own history in order to understand themselves, as well as it is for Endō and the Japanese. In some if not most cases, this appropriation is not as self-conscious as it was for Endō. However, regardless of whether it is consciously done or not, all peoples can only understand themselves and their pasts in terms that are meaningful for them now, in the present. Where there are cultural and historical differences, the task takes on various shapes and expressions. For some, the conflicts are no doubt less severe, making such reconciliations as Endō's less painful. But none of us is able to escape our own historicity. Thus, in appropriating his own past Endō Shūsaku is, although unknowingly, no more and no less than an ordinary man.

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