

Endo's Christianity : Is Sacrament Necessary?

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1. Vatican II and Endo

Shusaku Endo's publication of *Silence* in 1966 almost synchronized with Vatican II. Although closely modeled on *The Power and the Glory*, a work of Graham Greene whom he privately regarded as his master, the theme for his novel was different. In it he tried to express his own Christianity rooted in his own Japanese sensibility and culture. As was expected, he was criticized and attacked not only by Catholics but also by Protestants. Yet he was confident of his own Christianity, the result of his long quest to search for a harmony between East and West in his person.

The spirit of the Second Vatican Council gradually proved favourable to him. The Church showed her great capability for acknowledging other religions, for attempting a closer unity of mankind and, above all, for respecting different cultures.

Throughout her history the Church had the tradition of making use of the native cultures of different nations in the process of Christianization. Often she collaborated with European colonialism. But "Today, the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world"(Abbott 202).

Now each nation with its own culture has come to be recognized as equal, or at least, begun to be, in the Church's view of the world. This was a new trend away from the long standing basic concept that the superior European Christianity should spread over other areas with "inferior" cultures just as water flowing down from the height to lower places. Now "... the church affirms that all peoples of the earth with their various religions form one community; the Church respects the spiritual, moral, and cultural values of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.... "(*Ibid.* 202).

Symbolic of this new principle is the adoption of each nation's vernacular in place of Latin for Mass and other forms of the liturgy. Article thirty-six for Liturgy admits: "... since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of great advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be expanded"(*Idid.* 150).

It was natural that Endo should feel that his day had come at last. Before the Second World War, or even as recently as forty years ago, Endo would certainly have been

regarded as a heretic and been rejected. The truth is that he, just like Greene, "died in the arms of the Church"(West 257). What he was constantly doing was trying the adaptability of Christianity in his attempt to adjust it to his own sensibility inherent in the Japanese culture. He did this faithfully following his conscience. For "God calls men to serve Him in spirit and in truth. Hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion. God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created; man is to be guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom"(Abbott 690). Christianity shows an ample adaptability. This is how its doctrine develops.

2. Baptism: The Origin of Conflict between East and West in Endo

Endo as a boy of eleven "was forced" to be baptized by his mother whom he was unable to resist. It was not a conversion but an initiation into a religion. He tried to please her who, he knew, had suffered bitterly from a divorce; her suffering made her a Catholic. The boy was baptized without realizing its full significance. He became exposed to an entirely different culture. This was to pose a serious problem for him. He began feeling as if he had to "wear an ill-fitting, ready made suit"(Endo, *Japanese Believe* 16).

His struggle started to fit this "Christian suit forced on by his mother"(*Ibid.* 16) to his body. This struggle is extraordinary among Japanese Christians in the sense that he tried to change the suit according to his physique and not the other way round. Many accept Christianity without question and voluntarily conform to the foreign culture which comes with it. After the Meiji Restoration Christianity appeared as a promising herald of Western culture which the nation welcomed in its efforts to modernize Japan. After the Second World War it added a different yet still attractive colour, especially that of the American culture. There are naturally others who experience a dilemma similar to Endo's; they either apostatize or endlessly postpone facing it. There are yet others who try to observe literally and rigidly every rule required by Christianity and try to adapt themselves to it; usually they are converts who have accepted the faith after reaching adulthood.

Fortunately (or unfortunately) Endo became a Catholic, before forming a basic view of life and was thus much freer about his religion. But to tailor his new foreign jacket was neither easy nor liable to be appreciated (to put it mildly) by the Church and many of his fellow Christians.

Throughout the history of Christianity, especially Catholicism, this problem has not been uncommon. Christianity has changed individuals or nations according to its doctrine. Early converts made efforts to conform to the new religion; the Germans abandoned their Odin and Thor and many of their traditions for the Christian God. The

question is the matter or degree. The important fact is the endeavour for adaptation has been mutual. For Christianity has changed, too, in order to be accepted by peoples of different cultures; it "has even changed from the first and even accommodated itself to the circumstances of times and seasons"(Newman 36). This is its development. In this bilateral effort both Christianity and paganism have groped for a harmony.

But Endo as an individual felt a serious threat from this European religion to his Japanese identity. He saw clearly the danger of its being crushed. "The conflict between East and West, especially in relationship to Christianity"(Johnston 1) began taking a clear shape in him. For Endo the essential issue was whether he would give up his faith or his identity as a Japanese. He had been convinced that there existed an unbridgeable gap between the East and the West. In his novels his characters feel that European thinking and Christianity are so logical and rigid that Japanese find it difficult to accept them unconditionally. In *Samurai* Tsunenaga Hasekura repeatedly says "Their Christianity is too harsh for us to accept". In *The Deep River* Fr. Otsu tells Mrs Naruse, his former classmate at university, of his alienated, though not quite repugnant, view of the European way of thinking and their Christianity which he experienced in France:

Living in a foreign country for nearly five years, I was impressed with European thinking being so very lucid and logical; but it was so lucid and logical that it seems to me as an Oriental person that it overlooked something and that I could not accept it. For me their lucid logic and reasoning were even painful. This is primarily because I am not so intelligent nor studious as to understand their logical power but more greatly because my Japanese sensibility has estranged me from European Christianity. After all their faith is so deliberate and rational that they would not admit what they cannot comprehend through reason and consciousness. I have been lonely for these five years suspecting I was wrong not only in my daily life when I was studying theology but also when I was taken on trips to holy places by my seniors (186).¹

During almost three years of his sojourn in France, Endo's realization of being an outsider to European Christianity or "Hellenistic Christianity"(Johnston 16) and its culture became poignant and it only deepened.

Now the question for Endo was if it was possible to continue being a Christian without abandoning his Japanese identity. He finally decided to keep both of these

attributes. To keep them both he had to change Christianity according to his own design. This was the very origin of his own religion and literature.

He began a study of Japanese Christians under the persecution begun towards the end of the sixteenth century. His attention was naturally drawn to the majority of Christians called *korobi*--"tumbled Christians"--who professed to give up faith under torture. He became attracted to them because of their human weakness and "Japanese-ness". His study led him to change greatly the European Christianity to which he had been introduced. This was to develop into his unique Christianity.

3. The Problem of Sin

In the beginning of his career as a writer, Endo treated the problem of sin as his theme. This is also one of the major themes of Graham Greene. The fruit was *The Sea and Poison* (1957) in which he explores the psychology of the sinner in Toda and Suguro, the medical students, who have been coerced into assisting their supervisor and seniors in performing vivisections on living American POWs during World War II. In the medical department of a Japanese university it is impossible for subordinates, let alone students, to refuse the directions of their professor. For Suguro and Toda their feelings after the operation are quite different. Suguro feels that his career as a physician has been wrecked; after this he is to lead the life of a minor private practitioner tormented by remorse of conscience. Toda justifies his behaviour and acts as if he has no bad conscience. His is a case much more serious than Suguro's. His feelings have become numb; even when he sees the parts of the body he has dissected he does not feel pain in his heart. The truth is that he feels eerie about himself. "What he wants now is remorse of conscience and violent pain in his heart"(377-8); "he is anguished that he has fallen to the farthest bottom"(378). His situation is comparable to Claudius' in *Hamlet* whose "words fly up"; and whose "thoughts remain below./ Words without thoughts never to heaven go"(3.3).

After this novel the same theme of sin is not featured in Endo's writing again. If he had pursued it, he would inevitably have continued struggling with the same sense of sin that the Western Christian has; this the Japanese find very hard to face. This is the sense of sin that Claudius and the heroine of *The Scarlet Letter* have; and, above all, this is what Graham Green handles so skillfully in his literature. Endo has parted with it.

4. "Tumbled Christians"

Endo is right in saying that the introduction of Christianity in the mid-sixteenth century by Francis Xavier was the first Japanese encounter with Europe and its culture

(Endo, *Age of Christianity*' 12).² As his letters testify Xavier was much impressed with the Japanese; the conversion of the nation especially in the western part of Japan was remarkably successful. Towards the end of the century, however, a government order was suddenly issued to expel the missionaries from the country. This was the beginning of the long persecution of Catholics in Japan which lasted till the late nineteenth century.

What attracted Endo was the existence of a vast number of the so-called "tumbled Christians". They are so called because they committed the sin of denying their faith but did not truly renounce it; they would later revoke their renouncement. Their having "tumbled" suggests their "getting up again". In the Edo Era under the Tokugawa regime, an extraordinarily diabolical institution named *fumie* ("trampling the picture") was introduced. Christians were forced to trample on a bronze image of Jesus set in a plaque to prove their renunciation of the Christian faith. In Nagasaki, for instance, it is reported, this had been practiced at every New Year throughout the Edo Era. The nominal Buddhists were forced to set foot on Jesus' face to show the authorities that they were faithful Buddhists and not "crypto-Christians" or "hidden Christians". After this they would go home, get together and perform an act of contrition for the forgiveness of their sins. No priest was available. They would repeat this every year for about two and a half centuries.

It is quite natural that Endo took deep interest in these "weak hidden Christians" rather than the martyrs of whom twenty-six were canonized. He had a naturally tender heart; he regarded himself as a weak person and even a "coward" and deeply sympathized with them. In his *Jesus Christ* he analyses the weakness of all the apostles -- not only Judas and Peter. He concludes that in order to avoid persecution they conspired to betray their master and negotiated with the Jewish authority for their safety. He is particularly concerned with the salvation of Judas.

His study on those Japanese Christians, especially the "tumbled" Christians or "hidden Christians", provided him with valuable facts about these historical Japanese Catholics and their religious mentality and sensibility derived from their national character. This is shown symbolically in their devotion to Santa Maria in the form of a Buddhist *Kannon*, one of *Amida's* followers who is noted for boundless mercy and is regarded by Japanese as a merciful mother; she has been made a major object of popular worship. Now the combined image of Mary with *Kannon* was called *Maria-Kannon*. That their devotion to her was stronger than that to God Himself signifies the nature of their faith. The weak sinner relies on her love which best manifests itself in her sympathy and mercy, just as the helpless and hurt child cries for his mother's loving care. The mother forgives his naughty behaviour *unconditionally* and consoles him, weeps with him and wipes his tears. Those "hidden

Catholics" were helpless in that they had to commit the sin of stepping on the face of their Lord each year. Their vulnerability needed an infinite sympathizer and consoler; they found the ideal one in *Maria-Kannon*. This combination was made to deceive the authorities under such strict prohibition.

This devotion also tells of yet another and probably more important national characteristic: the reluctance to face the absolute, let alone accept it. Conversely this nation has a preference for the nondescript, the soft and the tender and is ready to compromise. When it is possible to take two instead of one, they will take both and compromise between them. When Buddhism was first introduced into this country in the sixth century, almost at once it was compromised with Shintoism and this tradition has lasted.

The Japanese shrink from the fearful, punishing God; they would rather turn to the understanding, sympathetic Christ who consoles people by saying: "Happy [are] those who mourn; they shall be comforted..." Then what about Mary, the Mother of Christ? She is even tenderer and more caring than Christ. Of course, it is ludicrous to the eye of the Western Christian to divide the Trinity or to place Mary as high as the Father and the Son; it is so also to those Japanese who have properly learned the catechism. But to Japanese accustomed to an animistic view of the world, an only and absolute God who is omnipotent seems too unnatural as well as too awesome. To them the Mother of God is undoubtedly a goddess, an ideal object of devotion.

Receiving that insight from the "hidden Christians" and *Maria-Kannon*, Endo has combined the Son and the Mother in his God. To say his God is rather a Goddess than a God would not be too far from the truth. He says:

There are two types of religion: one is the fatherly religion in which God the Father gets angry, judges and punishes human beings who have disobeyed Him; they always fear Him and try to escape His punishment.

On the other hand, what is called the motherly religion is the one in which God, like the mother, forgives human mistakes and extends a merciful hand towards human beings in distress (*Age of Christianity* 206)

Based on this idea he defines his own motherly religion:

The motherly religion is that in which God forgives human beings and shares their sorrow just as the mother forgives her naughty children and shares their sorrow (*Ibid.* 242).

It is a forgiving religion as is suggested in the famous paradox expressed by Shinran, who founded *Jodo-shinshu*, a major Buddhist order in thirteenth century Japan: "*If the good are saved, how much more the bad*". It is Christ, Endo maintains, who turned the fatherly Christian religion to the motherly religion (*Japanese Believe* 112). Disregarding the masculine and soldierly aspect of the Son who is the Commander of the heavenly army and drives Satan's forces out of heaven down to the "bottomless perdition" in *Paradise Lost* and the Commander of his good army against Satan's in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, Endo has transformed him into a weeping weakling who is incompetent, powerless, useless and unable to perform miracles (*Jesus Christ* 134). In a discussion with an eminent critic, Endo has said: "I do not believe Christ's miracle stories" (Endo, "Discussing *By the Dead Sea*"). Instead, he has magnified the Christ who is sympathizing and loving especially when he gives his sermon on the mount. He has done so to make him the ever faithful friend, sharing men's troubles and sorrows. This is exactly the image of the mother. To the formation of this Christ and the mother God, his own mother contributed much; as a young man Endo underwent a few major operations for TB and it was his mother who never failed to be by his bedside.

5. Rodrigues' "Tumbling" in *Silence*

By the time he wrote *Silence*, Endo had been transformed into a completely "Japanese Christian" writer. In this work his view of Christianity in Japanese culture has been consolidated. It manifests vital aspects which are incompatible with Catholic doctrine. The foremost difference is his idea of God who is not actually God but Goddess; also different is his view of the sacraments, especially that of penance.

The climax of *Silence* is shocking to the Christian reader, while to the non-Christian Japanese reader it is not. Christ allows Sebastian Rodrigues, the hero, to trample on his face saying:

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 (Johnston 271).

To finalize the betrayal of Rodrigues, his former superior and now an apostate, Christovao Ferreira, persuades him through coaxing and sophistry; he is collaborating with the police now under the Japanese name of Chuan Sawano. His words to Rodrigues have the effect of

opium:

If you say that you will apostatize, those people will be taken out of the pit. They will be saved from suffering.

... you are now going to perform the most painful act of love that has ever been performed (*Ibid.* 268-9).

"The most painful act of love" is performing *fumie* to complete his "tumbling". But here arises a question: whether or not Rodrigues has actually apostatized in the true sense of the word. In fact it is a betrayal similar to Peter's. Peter repeatedly denied his master but this does not mean that he apostatized. It is a sin comparable to those Christians commit daily which can be forgiven. Peter remained one of Jesus' apostles, in fact the leading apostle, till the end of his life. When Rodrigues has trampled the face of Christ, a cock crows to remind the reader of Peter's denial. And it is the same crowing sound which indicates the restoration of Rodrigues' faith after Peter's manner, even though he may not remain in the Church.

Endo has carefully planned the psychological development of Rodrigues' "tumbling" towards this climax; in fact, to interpret it on another level, *Silence* is a novel of a young, zealous and ambitious European missionary's "tumbling" describing how he has gradually been compelled to betray Christ in a totally different culture and climate. In this sense the novel may be said to treat the problem of sin. But the Western concept of penance and forgiveness is absent. This is the point of departure from orthodox Catholicism. This will become clearer when we compare the climax of this novel with a similar scene from Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*.

In Greene's work, speaking to Scobie, God is inordinately kind and understanding. What is more, he is so unreasonably humble as to compare himself not only to a "beggar" but also to "a faithful dog"; and he *pleads* with Scobie not to commit suicide. Then he adds: "I have been faithful to you for two thousand years" (305). Being too humiliating, this picture of God must be disagreeable to most Christians. It seems to me, however, Endo, far from being shocked, took a great clue from this scene for the making of his own mother-God and also for the climax of *Silence*. He had first read *The Heart of the Matter* in 1951 while he was still in France (*Writer's Journals* 269).

It would not have been wholly unnatural for him to think that if even Greene had depicted such an undignified and even miserable God, then why would not he attempt his own? Greene gave Endo a certain assurance. The latter was to consolidate his new idea

of God by his studies on the "hidden Christians".

But there is an essential difference between these two writers of East and West concerning their interpretations not only of God but also of the sacraments, especially the sacrament of penance. Endo's mother-God, let me repeat, forgives the sinner *unconditionally*. This in short means that Endo simply disregards this sacrament as he sees no necessity for it for salvation. To be forgiven, the sinner need not take any responsibility since it is precisely the mother-God who takes his responsibility for him in the final "conversation" scene between God and Scobie:

But out of the blue the writer brings in the question of responsibility in this unbearable climate; he had to assign the responsibility to Scobie alone. Greene twisted him to suit his theme. This is the fault of this novel (*Ibid.* 269)

Here it is difficult to assume that Endo misunderstood Greene's intention; he, on his part, must have decided not to take Greene's idea of responsibility for his own purpose.

Scobie out of his love of God would not agree to attribute his own responsibility to God. To the point of being arrogant he insists on the justness of his profession and on living up to it. He says to Him: "... you made this feeling of responsibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks" (*Heart* 305); and with it he dies. This is his literal way of sharing the cross with Christ. Fr Rank tells Scobie's widow at the very end that he thinks Scobie "really loved God" (*Ibid.* 320). Scobie's attitude towards God about responsibility is exactly opposite to that of Rodrigues as will be seen below.

Not only the sinner's but also God's attitude is essentially different in the two writers. In Greene, God, even though he is infinitely humble to Scobie, would never compromise about the sacrament of penance, let alone ignore it. He says, though in the most gentle manner, that Scobie should receive the sacrament: "All you have to do now is ring a bell, go into a box, confess. . . the repentance is already there, straining at your heart. It's not repentance you lack, just a few simple actions: to go up to the Nissen and say good-bye" (*Ibid.* 305). Together with repentance, it is a confession and "a few simple actions" that God insists on making Scobie perform. Without his doing them, even almighty God cannot save him.

Greene is faithful to the doctrine even if he had "much of the confusion on religious questions. . . which have caused his readers and critics such confusion. . ." (*West* 28). His God is relentless about the most important matter -- the salvation of Scobie. He is the God for Westerners.

After deciding on the mother-God of boundless mercy who takes all the responsibility of the sinner, Endo has developed his image of Jesus as the eternal and ever-faithful friend who is utterly powerless and sympathizes with people in distress and who consoles them, sheds tears for them and is always by their side. This is Endo's mother-God and ever-accompanying Jesus who is Love.

6. The Significance of the Sacraments

As has been seen above concerning the difference between Endo and Greene regarding penance, Endo's treatment of sacraments can be best understood when it is compared with that of Greene.

In Endo priesthood does not seem to retain so much importance as in Greene. The difference of the idea of this sacrament in the two writers appears in the two priests in *Silence* and *The Power and the Glory*. The "act of love" by Rodrigues of betraying Christ in order to save his followers from the most cruel torture is starkly contrasted with the shrewdness of the whiskey priest in surviving the pursuit for Christ and the people. An alcoholic and fornicator, the whiskey priest has the shrewdness of trading sacraments for food and shelter; his manner of baptizing babies and hearing confessions is not quite appropriate. All he endeavours is to escape the pursuit of the police for the sole purpose of performing his priestly duties for his flock.

Green's whiskey priest, unlike Rodrigues, never wavers in his priesthood. This is best shown in two scenes. One is when he has to forego the opportunity to escape Tabasco for a native boy's dying mother. He decides to miss his boat and says: "I shall miss it, . . . I am *meant* to miss it"(13). His words signify his sense of duty to follow God's order. In the other his sense of duty is manifested most strongly when he is led by the mestizo--the prototype of Kichijiro in *Silence*--to the dying American murderer; he is well aware of the mestizo's treachery and the danger of being arrested (and executed as a natural consequence). He has to perform sacraments to save the American's soul, whether he is a murderer or not and under any circumstances. Conversely the American is concerned with the safety of the priest and says to him: "You don't need to trouble about me. I'm through"(225); and repeats: "Beat it". He knows that soon the police will surround the place. The whiskey priest sacrifices his life for his priesthood, whereas Endo's hero saves his life by performing the "act of love", *fumie*.

The theme of *The Power and the Glory* is unmistakably stated by the writer himself:

I wanted to show that man's office doesn't depend upon the man. A priest

in giving the sacrament believes he is giving the body and blood of Christ, and it doesn't matter whether he himself is a murderer, and adulterer, a drunkard. It doesn't affect the sacrament (Donaghy 48).

In other words, this is the very thesis of the book (*Power and Glory*. p.ix).

In appearance and behaviour Endo's Rodrigues is the epitome of the heroic missionary, while the whiskey priest is the anti-hero. By comparison they form light and shadow. But their appearances and behaviour are exactly opposite to their true characters and religious convictions. Rodrigues, under an extremely difficult situation, gradually becomes disillusioned. When the lives of three Japanese Christians are at stake depending on his colleague Gaarpe's "tumbling", he blames God: "You are silent. Even in this moment are you silent? . . . Do not impute all this to Gaarpe and me. *This responsibility you yourself must bear*" (Johnston 216-7).

This is the ultimate justification to prepare his own "tumbling". The young, idealistic Portuguese missionary, who with burning desire was eager to enter "that stricken land" and to give the "flock of sheep without a shepherd" "courage and to ensure that the tiny flame of faith does not die out. . . ." (*Ibid.* 34), finally steps on his Lord's face. The writer thus degenerates him to one of the "weaklings" and "tumbled Christians". Different in nationality, appearance, and function as he is, he is after all no different from his flock in his faith.

The effect of sacraments is clearly the main theme not only of *The Power and the Glory* but also another work, *The End of the Affair*. In it Greene explores the effect of baptism combined with the possibility of deriving good out of sin. It begins to take place when Sara puts herself in a dilemma between her lover and God. When a German bomb explodes in the street near the house where they are meeting and Bendrix is crushed under a heavy door, she is certain that he is dead. She is frantic and "mad" to kneel down on the floor to pray to God (99) for the first time in her life. She determines to choose God in order to save Bendrix's life. This means she has to give him up for ever. From this moment onward she has to be afraid again of "the desert" in the soul; "if one could believe in God, would he fill the desert?" (95). Resisting the burning desire to return to her lover, she bravely begins her hard journey for God through the desert. God draws her to Him relentlessly. It turns out after her death that Sara was born a Catholic; only she did not know it nor had she received a religious education.

Endo also treats this matter in his *Samurai*, a novel about a colossal journey to Rome from Japan in the early seventeenth century. The delegation is assigned a double mission:

to obtain Spain's premission to open direct trade between Mexico and Japan and also to bring European missionaries to Japan. To help to accomplish his duty, Hasekura, the samurai, finally gives in and reluctantly receives baptism in Madrid. The reason for his reluctance is typically Japanese in that he feels he would betray his ancestors (207) whose religion had been the combination of Shintoism, Buddhism and Confusionism. His excuse is that his baptism is merely "the means" to succeed in his mission. That the effect of baptism, regardless of one's intention, takes place is his sole consolation. In the end he is to find Christ the eternal companion and consoler.

Endo's handling of the matter is not so effective as Green's. One feels as if one read the writer's faithful repetition of the catechism on baptism, whereas Greene's treatment of it surprises, and then convinces the reader, partly due to his use of the technique of the detective story. *Samurai* after all should be taken as novel in line with *Silence*, *By the Dead Sea* and *The Deep River*--the series of novels about his main theme: the unconditionaly forgiving, consoling, accompanying mother-God Christ.

At least it would not be far from the truth to say that the sacraments in the Catholic Church comprise a system so that when one of them is abandoned, it affects the whole system. In this sense Endo could no longer be Catholic in the traditional sense. This is the natural consequence of his reforming Christianity for himself.

7. *The Deep River*

Endo's religion has gradually acquired recognition regardless of cultures. He continued his efforts to develop his religion (or perhaps religious culture) identifying with the other established religions. This was to be the theme of his last novel, *The Deep River*. To this John Hick contributes. In his *Creative Notes for Writing The Deep River* (*Hukai Kawa Sosaku Nikki* published posthumously in 1997), there is a note-worthy entry for September 5, 1991 about his encounter with Hick's *The Problem of Religious Pluralism* in Japanese translation.⁴ As a student of Jungian psychology, he writes: "This is not a mere chance but the realization of what my unconscious mind has been searching for" (*Creative Notes* 24). This book overwhelmed him and he immediately obtained another book by the same author, *God Has Many Names* (by the same translator) which he was "reading at the moment" (*Ibid.* 24).

Hick's theology gave the theme to his new book *The River* which was to be changed to *The Deep River* after the Negro spiritual of the same title the writer had happend to listen to (*Ibid.* 131). Hick's religious pluralism affected him so deeply that he not only adopted it for his book as its theme but also talks of its essence in one of his last religious

essays, "What Exists in the Foundation of Religion" included in *Creative Notes for Writing The Deep River*, as if it were a natural development of his own view of Christianity. This is quite understandable. For Hick's thought is parallel to the final stage of the development of Endo's religion. This was only to be expected. What he had been endeavouring to demonstrate since *Silence* is that there should be a Japanese faith of Christianity different from a European faith (*Ibid.* 156). Endo directly echoes Hick on various points in the same essay. On one of them he says:

... the choice of one's religion is greatly influenced by the circumstances, culture and historical backgrounds in which one finds oneself. But I think that the essence of doctrine is basically common to any religion. The difference is the routes which lead to the same summit--whether it is northern, western or southern (*Ibid.* 157).

Hick's pluralism has confirmed the conclusion of the development of Endo's religion. Under religious pluralism, there should be room for Asian (Japanese) Christianity different from European Christianity. Endo was endorsed and encouraged by Hick to write his new novel.

Hick's pluralism presupposes different traditions or cultures for great religions. Endo agrees with Hick and thought of Christianity as equal to other religions, and also of Asian Christianity as equal to European Christianity. What he has finally attained is the thought that "the onion"--i.e. Jesus -- exists everywhere.

It is rather curious that Endo found a hint for the theme of *The Deep River* also in Greene's final novel *The Human Factor* and quoted the double agent Castle's words in the same *Notes*:

For a while I half believed in his [a Catholic priest's] God, like I half believe in Carson's. Perhaps I was born to be a half believer (107).

To reciprocate the great favour of the communist Carson who rescued his African wife from the BOSS in South Africa, Castle has leaked information to him as a "little help". He sways between the Christian God and communism. Endo from Castle's words has drawn a suggestion to decide on his own thought:

I have come to half believe in the Hindu God as well as the Christian God. What is important is not the form of religion but the moment one finds

Jesus' love in other people. Jesus exists in Hindus, Buddhists and in atheists
(*Creative Notes* 63)

Having chosen India for the setting of his last novel, Endo is to make his hero Father Otsu (who was Hukatu originally in his *Diaries*) echo these words in his work. With his fundamental theory reinforced by both Hick and Greene, Endo's slow and lagging pen due to his ill-health has quickened. *The Deep River* came out in 1993.

In this novel his mother-God appears in the person of Father Otsu; at the time she is the Ganges, the deep river itself. From France Otsu reached Israel where he was finally ordained and now he finds himself in India living in a brothel and helping the outcasts at their last moment. He carries them to the river to fulfill their lifelong desire for their ashes to be embraced and bourn away by the mother Ganges. In him the sacrament of Catholic priesthood is not prevalent.

In his discussion about *The Deep River* with William Johnston, the Jesuit theologian who had translated *Silence*, Endo drops a hint of his interest in what he calls "the Third Religion". At least he mentions it: "It is neither a sort of [religious] sectionalism nor a systematized religion such as Christianity, Buddhism or Islam; it is a religion which transcends all these--or rather it is something like religion (*Exploring* 181)". This may have been the direction his religion would take, if it was to be developed even further. There is no theoretical discrepancy in it. One may be able to say that he has already reached this stage in *The Deep River*. But his religion is centered upon Jesus Christ however transformed he is.

Fr Johnston quotes the words of an American priest that the remarkable thing about Endo's works is that he places Christ in the centre of his attention -- i.e. he is always concerned with him and fights for him (*Ibid.* 179). The Jesuit continues:

The most important thing for the Christian is his commitment to Jesus Christ, to entrust himself to Christ as the *Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*. If he is certain of this commitment, all else will be automatically solved. For we should differentiate between faith and theology. In our faith our commitment to the living Christ, metanoia, and the meaning of the line *Our Father who art in heaven* do not change, while theology changes according to culture. Theological interpretation of such matters as self and evil will possibly change. Therefore what is important is that the *Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (*Ibid.* 180).

“Leaving the old theology [“Thomism based on Aristotle’s philosophy”], what Christianity must challenge is to enter into a new culture: today’s world culture of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. This is the problem of Catholic theologians; and this has not been accomplished yet” (*Ibid.* 184). It is a Japanese novelist who has set a significant example.

The Christianity long contemplated and greatly transformed in the mind of the novelist in accordance with the age and his culture has reached India. In his mind it has been the final destination. It has changed so much that to many people it may appear beyond recognition as Catholicism but it is a genuine development in the Asian culture. In his most refined style J. H. Newman illustrates the nature of the development of Christian Doctrine:

From time to time it makes essays which fail and are in consequence abandoned. It seems in suspense which way to go; it wavers, and at length strikes out in one definite direction. In time it enters upon strange territory; points of controversy alter their bearing; parties rise and fall around it; dangers and hopes appear in new relations; and old principles reappear under new forms.

It changes with them in order to remain the same. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often (63).

To sum up the essence of his religion Endo makes Fr Otsu say to his former classmate, using the odd analogy between Christ and the onion, that Christ “exists in Hinduism and Buddhism as well as in European Christianity” (*Deep River* 296); and applying a further-extended metaphor between the onion (which is Christ) and the river: “Whenever I see the Ganges, I think of the onion. . . . The river of love, which is the onion, never refuses but accepts even the ugliest and the filthiest and runs” (*Ibid.* 298). It accepts people regardless of race, faith and culture. It rolls on for eternity.

Notes

1. This quotation is my translation from the original Japanese. Except for those from *Silence* translated by William Johnston, all the quotations from Endo are my translation.

2. Strictly speaking, Japan’s very first encounter with European civilization had occurred a few years earlier in 1543 when a Portuguese ship drifted to Tanegashima, an island south of Kyushu. This incident introduced the European musket to Japan and changed drastically the country’s war strategies,

greatly affecting Japanese history.

3. Italics mine.

4. Translated by Hiroshima Masa and published by Hozokan, Tokyo, 1990.

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