



FILM: **SILENCE**

FDG RATING: 3.5 
Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Martin Scorsese: *Director*
Liam Neeson: *Actor, Father Christovao Ferreira*
Andrew Garfield: *Actor, Father Rodrigues*
Adam Driver: *Actor, Father Garupe*

DATE: May 21, 2017

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **SILENCE**

Silence follows two 17th-century Portuguese missionaries (Andrew Garfield is Father Sebastian Rodrigues and Adam Driver is Father Francisco Garupe), in their perilous search for their highly revered mentor, Father Christovao Ferreira (Liam Neeson) who disappeared on a missionary journey to feudal Japan. They fear he may have been killed and refuse to believe rumors that he renounced his faith to avoid a torturous prolonged death. They are determined to discover the truth.

Garupe and Rodrigues decide to make the same terrifying journey. Village after village, they witness brutal persecution to the converted Christians who worship in hiding, fearing they will be discovered. Punishment is the most horribly imagined tortures if they refuse to apostatize by stomping on an image of Jesus placed at their feet. Rodrigues desperately asks God for guidance and is frustrated by God's silence.

The film is a long 160 minutes of agonizing visuals intensified because of superb cinematography. Just one example is a samurai searching for suspected Christians, whom the villagers refer to as "the inquisitor". He straps some of the villagers to wooden crosses on the beach and places them in the ocean, where the tide eventually drowns them. The bodies are set on fire on a pyre as a form of cremation to prevent them from having a Christian burial. And that is possibly the mildest of tortuous punishment scenes.

The film raises a multitude of questions about spirituality, especially private versus public religious beliefs and practices. We wondered why the Japanese villagers would be attracted to Christianity and become such fervent worshippers despite the risk of death. They were treated cruelly by the Shogun lords so a possible reason is their belief that as Christians they will enter Paradise when they die. It is the only hope they have of ending their lives of suffering, hard work, sickness, and misery. They actually welcomed death because of the promise of Paradise.

It's the last 30 minutes (or less) that are the most meaningful, from a religious theology perspective, when Father Cristóvão Ferreira, who now goes by the name Sawano Chūan, is finally found in a Buddhist temple. His statements to Rodrigues, expound a profound spiritual philosophy. Ferreira says he committed apostasy while being tortured, and states that after 15 years in the country and a year in the temple, he believes Christianity is a lost cause in Japan. "There's a saying here, 'Mountains and rivers can be moved, but man's nature cannot be moved.'" He continues, "... everyone knows a tree which flourishes in one kind of earth may decay and die in another. It is the same with the tree of Christianity. The leaves decay here. The buds die." Possibly the most meaningful message he gives Rodrigues is: "No one should interfere with another man's spirit. To help others is the way of the Buddha and your way, too. The two religions are the same in this. It is not necessary to win anyone over to one side or another when there is so much to share."

Rodrigues points out that Christianity has flourished in Japan noting "...from the time of Saint Francis Xavier there were hundreds of thousands of converts here." But Ferreira counters that the Japanese only believe in their distortion of our gospel explaining that in the scriptures Jesus rose on the third day. In Japan, the sun of God rises daily and he points to the sun in the sky. The Japanese cannot think of an existence beyond the realm of nature. In Shintoism, spiritual powers exist in the natural world. The converts understood "the son of God" to be the sun in the sky.

In the powerful final scene, years later, when Rodrigues is being cremated, a hidden gesture is the crux of the spiritual conflict in this film.

Tortuous both visually and by being too long, many of our resident reviewers opted out of this one. But one resident critic applauded the nerve of Scorsese to make such a powerful film about faith without being preachy. The philosophical spiritual messages toward the end of the film elevated the story. Perhaps it's best to watch Silence in fast forward, pausing occasionally at pivotal scenes, and then resume normal speed when Father Ferreira appears.

We were awed by the gorgeous cinematography. (The credits noted that Silence was filmed in Taiwan.) And agreed the acting was excellent. We voiced a not so silent 3.5 for the film on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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[Film Discussion Group](#) (FDG) organizer