

Silence Study Guide

Silence by Shusaku Endo

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Plot Summary

Silence is the story of the Japanese persecution of Christians that occurred in the 1600s. More specifically, Endo traces the life of Sebastian Rodrigues, a Portuguese missionary from the Society of Jesus, as he tries to survive as a Christian priest working in Japan. Rodrigues and two of his friends journey to Macao, China. They hope to gain entrance into Japan in order to locate their former teacher, Christovao Ferreira. Ferreira has been working in Japan for over thirty years; but correspondence from the priest abruptly ceased, and only a few tales of how Ferreira apostatized following several torturous days suspended in the pit tell what happened.

Rodrigues, Francisco Garrpe, and Juan de Santa Marta gain permission from their Superiors in Portugal to make the journey from Lisbon to Macao. However, once the three priests land in China, they are informed that all Portuguese ships from Macao to Japan have been prohibited. Valignano, the administrator for the Society of Jesus working in Macao, forbids the priests from continuing their journey. After much discussion the priests obtain Valignano's permission to secure a Chinese ship and continue on to Japan. Santa Marta is deemed too ill to travel, and so only Rodrigues and Garrpe arrive in Tomogi, Japan. Their contact, Kichijiro, locates a group of Christian peasants willing to hide the priests in a charcoal hut just outside their village.

The priests have little contact with other villages and learn nothing about the fate of Ferreira. One day, officials come to the village looking for hidden Christian items. Garrpe and Rodrigues decide that it would be best for everyone if they separate and leave the village. Rodrigues sails across the sea but fails to find another village to hide in. As he struggles across the mountains he encounters Kichijiro, who has been trailing the priest for some time. Kichijiro promises to take Rodrigues to another safe village; but after several days of walking the priest is captured by officials.

Rodrigues is shifted between various holding huts before landing in a prison cell outside of Nagasaki, Japan. Nagasaki is the traditional seat of the magistrate, Inoue, who is responsible for the interrogation and torture of all captured Christians. Rodrigues knows of several priests who have apostatized following being suspended in "the pit" and figures that it is only a matter of time before he too is subjected to severe torture. The time in prison and the treatment of other prisoners forces Rodrigues to reflect on his own faith.

He draws parallels between himself and Christ as he is betrayed by Judas, persecuted by the Jews, and finally nailed to a cross. For most of the book Rodrigues feels that God has chosen to be silent about the suffering of His people. It is not until the very final chapter that Rodrigues comes to terms with God and all the events that have happened to him in Japan.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

A missionary from Portugal named Christovao Ferreira has reportedly apostatized following grueling torture and is now missing in Japan. One of his final letters to the Church in Rome details the extreme measures that the Japanese authorities are taking against Japanese Christians. Seven people, including five priests, a woman, and a young girl, are taken to the boiling waters near Unzen. There they are tied to stakes while hot water is ladled over them. Unable to force the Christians to apostatize the torturers remove them from the stakes and confine the woman to house of ill repute and imprison the priests in a local prison.

Three of Ferreira's students plan to enter Japan secretly in order to find the truth about Ferreira's fate. Francisco Garrpe, Juan de Santa Marta and Sebastian Rodrigues beseech the Roman church to allow them to pursue their mission. The three priests are given permission, and in 1637 they prepare to depart Lisbon for India. During the journey, their ship is plagued with bad weather and disease. Their voyage takes longer than expected and the priests do not reach their destination until October. Once in the town of Macao, the three learn that the situation in Japan has escalated and no Portuguese ships are allowed to enter Japanese harbors.

Valignano refuses to allow the three priests to enter Japan. Since he is in control of missionaries entering the country there seems that little can be done to salvage the expedition. Valignano has further information about Ferreira. In 1633 all news from priests living in the underground abruptly ceased. Merchant ships report that Ferreira was indeed taken and tortured in Nagasaki; but the sailors are unable to describe the priest's final fate. It seems that the three young priests have come to the end of their journey and are no closer to a conclusion than when they left Portugal.

Prologue Analysis

The prologue serves to associate the reader with several of the key characters in the story and provide important background information. The reader learns that there is a religious persecution in Japan, and the situation has become so intense that all relations with Portugal have been terminated. Despite these harsh conditions, the indomitable faith of three young priests propels them to seek out their former teacher. It is apparent early on that faith and government will compete for the fates of the missionaries.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Silence is the story of the Japanese persecution of Christians that occurred in the 1600s. More specifically Endo traces the life of Sebastian Rodrigues, a Portuguese missionary from the Society of Jesus, as he tries to survive as a Christian priest working in Japan.

Chapter one is a copy of a letter written by Sebastian Rodrigues. Rodrigues begins by briefly telling of the long journey from Portugal to Macao and the hardships the three priests faced. Santa Marta has become ill and is now unable to assist Rodrigues and Garrpe with work at the missionary college. Rodrigues continues to try to persuade Valignano to allow them to continue their journey to Japan, despite the rough seas and increased hostility of English, Dutch, and Japanese ships. Valignano finally gives in to the priest's request. Preparations begin to secure passage from Macao to Japan.

The decreased trade between Japan and Macao makes locating a Japanese person in the city difficult, but eventually one is found. A Japanese man named Kichijiro resides at the home of a local Chinese family. Rodrigues is not impressed by the man's drunken appearance and is immediately suspicious of Kichijiro. Garrpe questions Kichijiro's loyalty to the Christian faith; the man staunchly refuses to admit that he was or is affiliated with Christianity. However, Kichijiro agrees to return to Japan and aide the priests in finding a safe Christian village in which to hide.

A boat is secured for the priests' travel and outfitted with a crew of twenty-five Chinese sailors. Santa Marta's health continues to deteriorate. It is finally determined that he will be unable to continue the journey to Japan with his two friends. Kichijiro helps the sailors with preparing the boat; but the priests observe that the Japanese man is cunning and of weak character. When the Chinese are not watching Kichijiro ceases to labor. When the sailors beat him for his insolence the man falls to his knees crying out for pardon. Rodrigues concludes that their Japanese escort is a coward, while Garrpe continues to hound Kichijiro about his Christian beliefs. Finally, the priests' departure is only five days away.

Chapter One Analysis

The innocence of the young priests is clearly evident in their constant positivism regarding their journey to Japan. Even as Valignano tells them about the atrocities being affected by Inoue, the two men continue to beseech their Superior with the good that they could perform. These young priests are in no way prepared for what they will encounter in Japan. To them, the stories of torture are too severe to believe and "the pit" is an incomprehensible notion. Rodrigues and Garrpe are like adolescents who believe



that they are invincible; others may have failed before them, but they will be able to succeed.

The introduction of Kichijiro is the reader's first clue that the priests are in great danger. The man's peculiar behavior indicates that he is hiding some secret about his past. As a Japanese citizen he should have no trouble re-entering the country; but for some reason he must seek passage on board a Chinese vessel in order to avoid detection. Rather than being of use to his benefactors, Kichijiro creates constant trouble. He refuses to answer questions or to work on board the ship. Something has happened to this man to make him such a weakling. The priests should be attentive to Kichijiro's behavior because it provides clues about what is happening in Japan. If a native countryman has been so affected by the persecution, then the priests should wonder what is happening to foreigners.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two is also a letter written by Sebastian Rodrigues. It appears that approximately two months have passed since his last letter. For eight days after leaving Macao the priests' vessel sailed through good weather. Then a storm blew up that ripped a hole in the boat. The Chinese sailors, Garrpe, and Rodrigues spend a long night bailing water and trying to plug the hole, while Kichijiro hides behind a pile of luggage and is sick. As Kichijiro sits in his own filth and moans he murmurs the phrases "gratia" and "Santa Maria." The mention of the Christian words once again prompts Garrpe to interrogate Kichijiro's faith; but the man refuses to admit any association with the religion.

As the group sits exhausted from their night's work, one of the sailors sees a bird flying overhead and then notices twigs floating in the water. The boat has finally reached land. Garrpe and Rodrigues hide among the luggage and the sailors put up a small sail in order to avoid suspicion by larger ships. At midnight the boat makes landfall and Garrpe and Rodrigues wait hidden in a hollow for Kichijiro to return with villagers. As they wait, Garrpe and Rodrigues reflect on the similarity of their situation to that of Jesus' night of betrayal in Gethsemane. Finally Kichijiro returns with several Japanese villagers who claim to be Christians. The peasants hide the priests in a small charcoal hut on the mountainside above the village.

Once the priests have been settled into their new home, the villagers tell about their own lives. For the past six years the peasants have been living without the instruction of a priest or a brother. In lieu of proper religious instruction the villagers set up their own order of administration. They chose one of the older men to perform the role of priest or jiisama. A group of men called tossama teach the Christians and lead prayers. A third group of helpers, or mideshi, does whatever it can to ensure the safety of the villagers. Mokichi reports all this to Rodrigues and Garrpe. Mokichi notes that he does not know how other villages conduct their worship because there is little contact between groups. Since the persecution began distrust has increased between villages.

Garrpe and Rodrigues conduct Mass under the cover of darkness. During the day they sit quietly in their hut and try to appear invisible. The villagers visit them in small groups to give confession, say prayers or receive instruction. Each day two peasants bring the priests a small ration of food. They also dig a cave beneath the hut's floor in case of emergency. There is little for the two men to do for fear of discovery, so they are limited in their search for Ferreira.



Chapter Two Analysis

Rodrigues seems to fancy himself a more modern version of Christ. As the two priests wait for Kichijiro to return with help, they compare their situation to that of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest. Garrpe fears that Kichijiro will not return, while Rodrigues begins to think of the cowardly man as a Judas. Rodrigues has laughed about entrusting his life to such a man as Kichijiro, but he does not appear to fully trust him. Rodrigues appears to view their excursion to Japan as the chance of a lifetime: either he will successfully return to Portugal with the rescued Ferreira or he will be tortured and achieve martyrdom. Rodrigues' reasons for traveling to Japan seem selfishly motivated instead of being led by his faith in God. He is performing his duties as a priest, but is forgetting his duties as a Christian.

When the peasants reveal that they have instituted their own form of a church system Rodrigues is overjoyed. He views this advancement as a positive sign that Christianity has taken a firm hold on Japanese soil. However, given the priest's own concern with upholding the proper conduct of a priest, the reader may wonder if the Japanese have truly learned the tenants of Christianity or are merely imitating the actions of earlier priests. Just because the peasants go through the motions of hearing confessions or performing baptisms does not mean that they understand the meaning behind them.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Chapter Three continues with Rodrigues' letters. The time is now June, the start of the Japanese rainy season. The rain only intensifies the priests' confinement and sets their nerves on edge.

The villagers keep a detailed calendar of Christian feasts and conscientiously observe the sacred holidays. The peasants have perfected their meeting strategy. If officials should burst into a house meeting, it will appear that the villagers are only gathering to discuss ordinary village concerns. Officials have made it extremely difficult for Christians to gather, even in secret. A reward of three hundred pieces of silver is offered to anyone who informs the officials about hidden priests, two hundred pieces for information about a brother, and one hundred pieces about secret Christians. This is why tension and distrust are so high between villages.

One day, the priests sit crushing small bugs in their hut and begin to discuss the possibility of searching for Ferreira. They soon decide that the journey is too dangerous for them to make, and that there is no suitable messenger who could travel in their stead. When a break in the rain comes, the two men decide to venture outside their hut. They take off their kimonos and sit in the fresh air and sunlight. For several days after this first excursion outside in broad daylight, the priests continue to venture out from their hut for brief periods. One evening, they see two men watching them from an adjacent hill. The setting sun obscures their vision, and the strange men retreat down the hillside. Five days later, after performing a nighttime baptism, the priests hear voices outside their hut. Finally Rodrigues opens the door to find two bedraggled villagers standing before the hut. The two men have traveled for several days from a nearby village in hopes of meeting the two priests.

The men reveal that they learned of the priests' whereabouts from Kichijiro and that Kichijiro is a Christian who once apostatized. Finally, the truth about the Japanese man's peculiar behavior is revealed. Yet he seems to have redeemed himself in the eyes of the peasants of Odomari, a neighboring village. The men plead with Garrpe and Rodrigues to come to their village to perform mass. After discussing the situation with the Tomogi villagers, they decide that Garrpe will stay in Tomogi while Rodrigues travels to Odomari for five days.

During his stay in Odomari, Rodrigues performs numerous confessions and baptisms. He is inundated with peasants wishing to receive absolution or instruction. Before long it is time to return to Tomogi. As Rodrigues returns to Tomogi he feels uplifted and unafraid. His time of ministry in Odomari has renewed his spirits; but he is unprepared for his return to Tomogi. Mokichi meets Rodrigues at the prescribed meeting place and tells the priest to flee because officials are raiding the village.



Chapter Three Analysis

As the rainy season forces the priests to spend even more time inside their miserable hut, Rodrigues begins to doubt the presence of God. He vacillates daily between believing that God is with them and will protect them and the feeling that God has turned his back on their situation. Rodrigues' faith does not appear to be completely solid. While the reader may forgive the priest for being unsure in such hostile surroundings, it should also be remembered that at this point no one has presented the priests with a reason to be fearful. They are in a semi-protected environment and, presumably, their presence has not yet been detected. For a man who devoted his life to God at a very young age, Rodrigues seems unsure of how to minister and how to grow in his own spirituality.

The arrival of the two men from a neighboring village gives the priests their first opportunity to perform actual mission work in Japan. However, the invitation to visit another community presents the young priests with a challenge. Garrpe is very cautious and does not wish to make contact with the strange men. For Rodrigues this is the chance to do what he came to do in Japan: to minister to those in need. It is difficult for the reader to distinguish which man is correct in his thinking. Both men have valid points; but in the end, if the priests did not wish to take a risk, then they should not have boarded the Chinese junk and left Macao. Here is the opportunity to leave the charcoal hut and reach out to the persecuted peasants.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

The villagers are able to quickly hide their religious possessions and put off the officials with nonchalant answers to the questioning. Neither Garrpe nor Rodrigues is discovered and Rodrigues is able to return to his mountainside hut in safety. However, the incident raises suspicion among the villagers about how the officials could have known that something was happening in Tomogi.

On June 5th Rodrigues senses that something strange is happening in the village below. The two priests sneak out of their hut and hide in a brush patch overlooking Tomogi. They soon realize that the officials have returned and the priests hurry back to hide in their hut. After a long period of silence the two men once again venture out and learn what happened from Mokichi and Kichijiro. The guards demanded that the peasants admit to the Christian faith or a hostage would be taken. The Jiisama made an unsatisfactory reply and was promptly carted off with the guards. Three days later an elderly samurai returns to the village and again demands that the people confess their religion. If they refuse the peasants are to pick a hostage to be sent to the magistrate in Nagasaki. In the end it is decided that Mokichi, Ichizo, and Kichijiro will present themselves before the magistrate.

Some time passes before the villagers and the priests learn about the fate of the three men. Upon arriving at the magistrate's the men were told to trample a picture of the Virgin Mary. Each man, based upon the advice of Rodrigues, did so, but the magistrate was not fooled by their actions. The men were then told to spit upon the image but only Kichijiro complied with this command. Kichijiro is released and on June 22nd the officials return to Tomogi with Mokichi and Ichizo in order to exact further punishment. Two trees fashioned into crosses are set at the water's edge and the men are lashed to the stakes. At night the tide comes in nearly drowning the two men. For two days the men endure their torture. Ichizo makes no noise but Mokichi sings or moans whenever he has strength. Finally the men succumb to the hardship and die. Their bodies are burned and the ashes tossed back into the sea by the officials in order to prevent proper Christian burials.

Word soon comes to the village that the officials will now begin combing the mountainside for Christians. The two priests deliberate and then decide to part ways with the hope that one will survive and be successful. Garrpe journeys overland toward the village of Hirado, while Rodrigues travels by boat to another village. When Rodrigues arrives at the village he finds it completely abandoned. He manages to find a small bit of food and decides that it is safer to continue across the mountain. As he travels, Rodrigues comes across the remains of a fire and determines to try and catch the man who made it. A storm chases Rodrigues into a hut filled with the stench of human excrement. Rodrigues waits out the storm and begins to question his own faith. He does not understand why God seems to be silent during such a time of trial.



When the storm passes, Rodrigues continues on his way and soon comes to a village. He carefully observes the village, but then unexpectedly crashes down the slope. Near the bottom the priest realizes his mistakes and hurries to scramble back up the hillside before he is seen. At the top of the hill he encounters Kichijiro and realizes that this cowardly man is the same one who left the fire and the excrement. Rodrigues is not pleased to see the apostate and tries to leave Kichijiro behind. Kichijiro follows Rodrigues through the jungle, trying to entice the priest with the promise of a nearby Christian village. The apostate also mentions that he could receive three hundred silver pieces for turning the priest in to the officials. Rodrigues is again reminded of Judas' betrayal of Christ for thirty silver pieces.

Against his better judgment, Rodrigues accepts a piece of dry fish from Kichijiro and seals his own fate. For the next several days Rodrigues follows the Japanese man through the wilderness, constantly considering the possibility that he will soon be betrayed and captured. Rodrigues contemplates how Jesus would have felt toward Judas, and if He would have been able to forgive His former disciple. Kichijiro continues to keep Rodrigues' attention by mentioning that he knows where another father is living and how he will take Rodrigues to him. Rodrigues finally confronts Kichijiro about his most recent apostatizing and offers him the chance to confess for Mokichi and Ichizo. As Rodrigues preaches to the Japanese apostate, men approach and seize the priest. The sniveling Kichijiro has indeed betrayed Rodrigues.

Chapter Four Analysis

The risk taken by Rodrigues in the previous chapter has mixed results. The young priest feels vital and useful during his five-day stay in Odomari. He is able to perform an exhausting number of confessions, Masses, and baptisms. For possibly the first time in his life, Rodrigues is working as a real missionary priest and he is thrilled with the experience. However, the feeling of accomplishment is cut short upon his return to Tomogi and the ransacking of the village. Reality has been brought to the priests and they realize what exactly they are dealing with in Japan. The priests' previous actions have resulted in their own lives being jeopardized, as well as the lives of the Tomogi peasants. Two of the villagers lose their lives because of the priests' concealed presence and the village's refusal to acknowledge their hidden faith. At this point the priests must make another difficult choice: stay together or risk capture alone.

Perhaps the scariest thing about separating is that the priests will no longer have anyone to rely on in this hostile country. At least together they would be able to find a small measure of comfort in one another and work as a team to find food and shelter. The separation of the two friends may not have been the best plan of action, but once separated, they must each come to terms with their actions. This separation is the chance for each man to grow in the strength of his faith. Now they must each believe in the voice of God and trust that He is watching out for them in the foreign land. Rodrigues continues to struggle with his faith, but also compares himself to Christ in His final days. Rodrigues seems to dream of being martyred and still considers Kichijiro to be his personal Judas. Rodrigues appears to be following some preconceived script. He

looks for ways to make the script come true, instead of allowing things to occur naturally.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

Chapter Five marks the end of Rodrigues' letters and the story is now told in the third-person narrative. Rodrigues is taken to a small hut on the outskirts of a village. Here he meets a small group of peasants who have also been captured. Rodrigues talks with the peasants and learns that they are Christians. One of the women offers the priest a cucumber to eat and tells him about each of the other prisoners.

A samurai arrives and questions the peasants before having them taken away by the guards. The samurai then turns to Rodrigues and tells the priest that the fate of the peasants rests with him. If Rodrigues will apostatize then the men and women will be set free; however, if the priest refuses, the prisoners will be tortured. Rodrigues is then pushed into the small hut that will now be his prison cell.

After a time another samurai comes to visit Rodrigues. This man is an interpreter, who engages the priest in a twisted conversation on ethics and religion. Finally the interpreter has enough of Rodrigues' words and tells him again that if the priest does not apostatize the peasants will be tortured in the pit. The order has come directly from Inoue. Several fathers have already succumbed to the agony of the pit. Rodrigues becomes more attentive when the samurai mentions Ferreira's name. The interpreter then says that Ferreira apostatized and now lives in Nagasaki alongside the Japanese.

In the evening the guards remove Rodrigues from the hut and take him through the village to the wharf. They board a ship and set sail. Rodrigues dozes during the journey but learns from his captors that they are going to Yokose-no-Ura. This port town was once the site of a great Jesuit harbor where feasts were held. Now the town is abandoned and burned to the ground. As Rodrigues views the countryside from atop a horse, he notices a beggar man standing among the villagers. The man is none other than Kichijiro. When the procession stops at a house where the guards sit and eat, Kichijiro brings a small bowl of rice to Rodrigues. Rodrigues can do nothing except think to himself of the phrase Christ spoke to Judas at the Last Supper: "Go, what thou dost do quickly." The guards finish eating and Rodrigues notices that Kichijiro continues to follow behind the procession.

Chapter Five Analysis

What Rodrigues has been anticipating since leaving Macao has finally happened: he has been captured. The martyrdom that he appears to be seeking is now apparently at hand and the priest seems to reveal in the idea. His fantasy, that he is Christ betrayed by Judas, intensifies. He is led to a prison cell and questioned by samurais. In his desire to be remembered as a devout priest who refused to renounce his faith, Rodrigues fails to see the opportunity before him. Several peasants are being held



prisoner, but could be released if the priest would only apostatize. Rodrigues fails to realize which course of action will bring him greater fame and glory. He seems to forget that Christ made a sacrifice of himself for the good of man so that man would no longer have to suffer. Instead, Rodrigues chooses to let the peasants suffer while he remains alive in prison. The young priest does not take responsibility for the situation, but rather places the burden on Kichijiro's shoulders by constantly repeating the phrase, "Go, what thou dost do quickly."



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

The caravan stops at the plain of Chizukano and waits for an unknown guest from the south. A new troop of guards arrives to take Rodrigues to another small hut on the outskirts of Nagasaki. Rodrigues spends several days in quiet contemplation before being moved to a cell in the guards' house. The following day several men and women are brought into the courtyard and forced to labor in the fields. Rodrigues is granted permission to visit the peasants as they work. He recognizes them as the villagers he met soon after his own capture. The priest's days settle into an odd sort of routine. He spends his days with the peasants in the field listening to their confessions and praying with them. Rodrigues convinces the guards to give him some paper, and at night he writes down what has been happening to him since his capture.

One morning a guard gives Rodrigues some new clothes and tells him to hurry and get dressed. Rodrigues is then taken into the courtyard and placed before five samurai. One of the men begins to question the priest. The samurai talks in quiet, calm tones and Rodrigues gives his answers equally quietly and respectfully. Rodrigues is cautious during the investigation and is surprised to learn that the old samurai, who has been so benign, is actually the evil Inoue.

Three days later the Christian prisoners are made to dig three holes in the middle of the courtyard. One of the men falls sick from sunstroke and eventually dies. Kichijiro reappears and tries to make contact with Rodrigues, but he is chased off by the guards. The priest is taken to the cell of the other prisoners and finds Kichijiro cowering in a corner. The apostate begs the priest to listen to him; and Rodrigues is unable to refuse the cowardly man's confession.

One morning the prisoners are told to trample the image of the Virgin Mary, but all of them refuse. All of the prisoners are returned to their cell, except for one elderly man who is made to kneel in the courtyard. Before anyone knows what is happening, a guard approaches the man from behind and kills the peasant with the swish of his sword. The body is then dragged to one of the three pits and tossed inside. Kichijiro then agrees to trample the sacred image. Rodrigues is appalled and perplexed by the situation. He sits in his cell watching the events in the courtyard and beseeching God for some explanation. The priest contemplates his own eventual death. He wonders if he is strong enough to continue to resist, or if he will ultimately succumb to the torture.

Chapter Six Analysis

Rodrigues finds his days in prison tranquil and peaceful. These are odd words to describe a filthy and miserable situation. The priest notes that he finds comfort in picturing the face of Christ. Since his childhood, Rodrigues has felt a calming effect



whenever he thinks of Christ's face. This exercise helps him now in the ugliness of his prison cell. However, the reader wonders if part of the priest's peacefulness results from his being removed from the main action of his circumstances. No longer does the priest have to worry about his fate. He has been captured and imprisoned and it is only a matter of time before he will achieve his dreamed of martyrdom. Rodrigues is now a simple observer of the events happening around him rather than a main participant.

Rodrigues is able to continue feeling disembodied from the action around him when he is permitted to minister to the five peasants imprisoned near him. The normalcy of acting out his religious training separates him from the reality of his situation. He is suddenly brought out of his self-imposed fantasy when one of the prisoners is brutally murdered. The realization seems to hit home that his inactions do indeed affect the lives of innocent people. For the first time Rodrigues questions whether he is doing God's will or his own, whether he is seeking glory for himself or truly ministering to God's people.

Rodrigues is also confronted with the vicious truth of martyrdom. The peasant's death is not glorious or awe inspiring, it is evil and underhanded. The weight of Rodrigues' position as a Christian priest captured by Japanese officials is slowly beginning to descend on him. These new revelations make him consider that this is what Christ intended missionaries to do: -to seek out the poor and wretched despite personal difficulty so that these people could be uplifted. Christ's goal was not to enter a foreign land in order to uplift himself.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

Rodrigues meets for a second time with the evil magistrate, Inoue. This time they discuss Christianity in a series of metaphors about a man with many wives. The interpreter seems to take pleasure in the conversation until Inoue admits that thirty years ago he used to consult with fathers and has never considered Christianity to be an evil religion.

Left alone in his cell Rodrigues once again contemplates the similarities between his own situation and that of Christ. As he traces the series of events leading up to Christ's crucifixion Rodrigues realizes that unlike the Savior, he has not had to suffer any physical pain. The priest then begins to wonder if Inoue has purposely ordered the guards to treat him well in order to affect a more terrific torture at a later time. Rodrigues resolves not to let their soft treatment of him weaken his senses.

One morning Rodrigues is awakened a commotion outside of his hut. Looking through the bars he sees the three remaining Christian peasants being herded past his prison cell. The priest does not learn the fate of the villagers, but several days later is taken from the hut and marched through the streets of Nagasaki. Rodrigues is made to sit on a stool overlooking the sea. Here he watches, as the three peasants are paraded down to the water. Garrpe is with them. The interpreter tells Rodrigues that if he apostatizes the villagers' lives will be saved but if he does not then they will be wrapped in straw mats and thrown into the water. Rodrigues seems paralyzed and makes no move to help the poor captives. Instead, Garrpe rushes forward into the water in an attempt to save the peasants, who have already been thrown over the side of a boat. Rodrigues watches as the peasants and Garrpe drown in the waves.

Following the deaths of the peasants and Garrpe, Rodrigues shrinks into a melancholy state. The interpreter comes to see Rodrigues and tells the priest that there is someone he should meet. Rodrigues is transported through the streets of Nagasaki in a covered caravan so that he cannot see where he has been or where he is going.

When Rodrigues arrives at his destination he is greeted with the sight of his former teacher, Ferreira. The once great priest did indeed apostatize and now lives a life of servitude for Inoue. As the two men talk Ferreira continually tries to assert his usefulness to the Japanese. Rodrigues stands in disbelief at the sight of his old mentor. The two engage in a lengthy debate about the state of Christianity in Japan. Ferreira emphatically asserts that the Japanese have never believed in the Christian God, but instead have distorted the missionaries' words and combined Christian teachings with their own religion. Rodrigues tries to refute his teacher's words, but eventually is overcome with emotion. Rodrigues is returned to his prison hut. There he sits and reviews his entire meeting with Ferreira. As he lies down to sleep, Rodrigues decides



that Ferreira is wrong in his beliefs and that there is still hope of salvation for the Japanese people.

Chapter Seven Analysis

The second meeting between Inoue and Rodrigues is more of a cat and mouse game. This is where the reader realizes just how cunning and evil the magistrate can be. Inoue enjoys the psychological torture more than the physical. Since this is the same method the magistrate used with Ferreira it appears that he reserves the honor of multiple forms of torture for high-ranking Christians. The physical exhaustion and mental breakdown of listening to others suffer is more horrendous than being suspended in the pit. At least the pit has a definable end while confinement to a cell can be indefinite.

When Rodrigues is forced to watch the deaths of Garrpe and the peasants thrown overboard, he is also forced to confront his own feelings regarding apostasy. His friend refuses to apostatize but is willing to give his own life in an attempt to save the villagers. Rodrigues seems unable to comprehend this action, since he sits on the hill and wills Garrpe to apostatize. The reader will notice that, when it comes to others renouncing their faith in order to save their lives, Rodrigues is very encouraging. He urges Mokichi, Ichizo, and Kichijiro to apostatize if it is asked of them. He now wishes that Garrpe would do the same. On the other hand, when Rodrigues is offered the chance to save lives by apostatizing, he refuses to act. The priest appears afraid of the martyrdom he fantasizes about achieving.

The climax of this chapter is Rodrigues' meeting with Ferreira. This is the man Rodrigues left Portugal to search for. This is the man whom the young priest had revered and tried to emulate throughout his priesthood. The man who stands before him now is a broken shell of what he once was. Inoue has achieved his goal of breaking the older priest and reducing him to a groveling minion. Ferreira repeats almost word for word the sentiments expressed by the magistrate regarding the state of Christianity in Japan. Ferreira has adopted the beliefs of the Japanese. He has assumed a Japanese man's life and name, and he works daily to prove his usefulness to the country. Ferreira is an example of what Inoue seeks to achieve by breaking down the Christian priests. Death by torture is a blessing for the captured. While it eliminates the problem the magistrate is trying to eradicate, it does not show his ultimate power over the Christians. This knowledge is what Rodrigues must now face. How long will he be able to hold out against Inoue's cunning? He considers himself a better and stronger man than Ferreira. Still, there is a sliver of self-doubt; and that is what Inoue will seize upon.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

Several days after his meeting with Ferreira, Rodrigues is taken from his cell, bound tightly at the hands and feet, placed on a barebacked horse, and paraded through the streets of Nagasaki. People flock to the procession to jeer and throw manure at the priest. Rodrigues tries to maintain a smile on his face but eventually the pain of his bindings weakens his resolve. As Rodrigues looks down on the crowd, he recognizes the face of Kichijiro. The coward is still following after the priest trying to seek redemption.

Rodrigues knows that this final procession usually precedes the captive's day of execution. He contemplates death and those who have gone before him. That night he is thrown into a cramped and urine stained cell. As he sits in the darkness, the priest hears noise outside that sound like his jailor snoring. Rodrigues finds the sound amusing and laughs out loud at the preposterousness of the situation. After awhile the interpreter arrives and tries for one final time to convince Rodrigues to apostatize. When the priest refuses to listen, the interpreter withdraws and leaves Ferreira with the task of changing Rodrigues' mind.

Ferreira tells Rodrigues that the snoring he hears is not snoring at all. It is really the sound of three prisoners suspended in the pit. This knowledge silences Rodrigues, as he realizes that he laughed at the sound of others being tortured. Ferreira continues to talk to Rodrigues, telling him that he, too, sat in the same cell listening to prisoners being tortured in the pit. Ferreira was suspended in the pit; but that is not what caused him to apostatize. He apostatized during the night that he sat listening to the suffering of the innocents in the pit.

Ferreira apostatized because he could not take anymore of God's silence and chose instead to end the suffering himself. Ferreira rationalizes that even Christ would have apostatized in order to save the lives of those suspended in the pit. Ferreira then leads Rodrigues from his cell into a room where the interpreter and two guards stand waiting. The interpreter places the image of Christ on the ground and says that trampling it is only a formality. Rodrigues stares intently at the image, apologizes to it, and then raises his foot and places it on the face of Christ.

Chapter Eight Analysis

Rodrigues sits in his cell contemplating death. He wishes for it to come quickly so that he can escape the torture of imprisonment. Rodrigues is still hoping to be martyred and avoid the possibility of apostasy. The priest does not want to sacrifice himself for others, but only to receive the same memorial status as Christ. He continues to play the part of the dutiful priest by hearing Kichijiro's confession once again. Despite whatever



happens in the next few days, Rodrigues must maintain the impression that he was strong and faithful until the very end if he wishes to be considered a martyr. However, reality once again invades the priest's fantasy. Inoue has orchestrated the night of Rodrigues' apostasy beautifully. The months of imprisonment, the sound of slowly dying peasants, and the meeting with Ferreira have deliberately worn Rodrigues' senses until he is confused and tired. This moment of weakness allows Inoue to send in Ferreira, Rodrigues' mentor, for the final blow. By attacking the young priest personally, Ferreira is able to break Rodrigues and convince him to step on Christ's image. Rodrigues' worship of Ferreira has led to his own downfall. What Rodrigues never realized about his former teacher is that Ferreira was also consumed with achieving his own glory; and this selfishness is what Inoue uses to defeat both priests.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

Summer has come to Japan. Rodrigues spends his days confined to a room where he can do nothing but look out on the free moving Japanese. Many of them still taunt him and children throw stones at his window. The priest is not allowed to leave his cell unless given permission by the magistrate. Rodrigues works now for Inoue classifying strange objects brought by foreigners from Macao. Rodrigues must tell the magistrate whether the items are Christian or not.

The brief visits to the magistrate's office bring him in contact with Ferreira and the interpreter. The interpreter conducts himself as if nothing unsavory had ever passed between them. The man smiles and talks to Rodrigues as though they are colleagues, exchanging idle gossip. Ferreira can barely look at Rodrigues, as Rodrigues feels disdain and disgust for his former teacher. However, he also feels pity and a slight understanding. The two men have become identical twins, caught in a trap of their own making. Each one tries to rationalize his actions in order to cope with the daily life he now leads. Although they share the same feelings and same lifestyle, the two men will never be able to find consolation in each other. In each other's eyes they find only a mirror of their own pain.

Chapter Nine Analysis

This chapter has a wistful tone to it and acts more like an epilogue than another chapter in the story. Rodrigues has apostatized. There seems little left to be said about him. The reader readily assumes that the priest's fate will mirror that of his former teacher, and indeed it does. Rodrigues is reduced to performing as another drone in Inoue's offices. Although the officials tried to make Rodrigues believe that the trampling of the "fumie" was nothing more than a formality, it is apparent that the priest has in effect been defeated and the Japanese have won yet another battle.

The reader feels disappointed and let down by Rodrigues, but not altogether surprised. For all of the priest's deep thoughts and earlier refusals to give in, his personal thoughts have been too contrary for the reader not to believe there is a slight chance of his downfall. In many ways the reader has come to identify so closely with Rodrigues, that now the reader, too, has suffered imprisonment and mental abuse to the point of exhaustion. As much as the reader wants Rodrigues to walk away from Inoue and the fumie, he understands, as Rodrigues comes to understand Ferreira, why the priest sets foot upon Christ's image.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Chapter Ten is composed of journal entries made by a Dutch clerk, Jonassen, working in the shipping yards of Nagasaki, Japan. The entries detail the coming and going of ships, as well as any suspect items found on board ships entering the port from Macao. Padre Rodrigues and Padre Sawano Chuan are noted to be present at examinations and trials of people found to be in possession of Christian artifacts.

The clerk continues to record the happenings at port but also notes that he is seeking more information on the two apostates: Rodrigues and Chuan, formerly Ferreira. On the fourth of January the fumie exercise is performed. A picture of the Virgin and Child is brought to each household so that each member can reaffirm their allegiance to Japanese doctrine by trampling the image.

Abruptly the story changes from the entries of the Dutch clerk to a third-person point-of-view. A man walks the streets of Nagasaki and is summoned to the Magistrate's office. Inoue tells the priest that, at the end of the month, he should take up residence in Edo, where a man named Okada San'emon has recently died. The priest will assume this name and take the man's widow as his own wife. Inoue says that there are Christians still worshipping in far corners of Japan. The magistrate tells Rodrigues that, since the roots of the Christian tree have been torn out of the soil, there is no reason to seek out these Christians and persecute them.

As Rodrigues waits in the prison to be moved to his house in Edo, Kichijiro visits him one last time. The coward once again comes to seek forgiveness and have the priest hear his confession. Although Rodrigues cannot technically perform the rite of confession, he does so anyway. In this final act Rodrigues comes to realize that he has not forsaken his Lord even though he trampled on the fumie. Rodrigues' life has been spent speaking of his Christian faith; and no magistrate will ever be able to take that away from him.

Chapter Ten Analysis

This chapter is confusing in what it is trying to convey to the reader. The purpose of the Dutch clerk's journal entries seems to be to show how life has continued following Rodrigues' apostatizing. The persecution of Christians continues and appears to have assumed a commonplace, nonchalant quality. Unlike Rodrigues' letters that relate the horrific suffering of captured peasants and priest, the clerk's journal dutiful records the deaths of convicted Christians, as if they are livestock being sold at auction. Ferreira and Rodrigues also contribute to the mundane atmosphere. The former priests serve as judges for confiscated artifacts and otherwise attend to their prescribed duties.



The reader is jarred by the sudden change in point-of-view. Suddenly the reader is following an unnamed man who, it may be safe to assume, is Rodrigues. Yet the reader is not certain. Inoue's instructions to Rodrigues indicate that the final piece of the process to transform the former priest into a member of Japanese society is taking place. However, Rodrigues' thoughts are made known and the reader realizes that the priest's heart is still fighting against the magistrate's power. The reader is surprised to learn that the evil magistrate has not broken Rodrigues. In fact the priest's commitment to his faith has only been strengthened by his ordeal. Through the sound of tortured peasants, shouting guards and cunning magistrates Rodrigues has found God's voice. He may have broken the rules of his priesthood but he has not forsaken his God and therefore the roots of his faith remain intact.



Characters

Christovao Ferreira

Ferreira is a Portuguese missionary who, after thirty-three years in Japan, reportedly apostatized following the torture of 'the pit.' Ferreira does not appear until very late in the story, but his presence is felt throughout. It is his unbelievable apostasy and subsequent disappearance that prompts Rodrigues, Garrpe, and Santa Marta to travel to Japan in search of the truth regarding the famous father's whereabouts.

Ferreira finally appears in chapter seven, when Inoue arranges a meeting between Rodrigues and his former teacher. Rodrigues is shocked to discover that the mentor he once considered a formidable proponent of the Christian faith has indeed apostatized. Not only has the great father renounced the faith he tried so hard to spread across Japan, but Ferreira now no longer believes that his work produced any good. Ferreira is a broken man whose lofty dreams were dashed apart after suffering the torture of the pit. Ferreira is now no better than Kichijiro the coward. In order to save his own life, Ferreira apostatized. Now he struggles to continually prove that his meager life is worthwhile to the Japanese. As a Japanese employee, Ferreira is now known as Sawano Chuan.

Sebastian Rodrigues

At the age of seventeen Sebastian Rodrigues entered religious life and studied at the seminary of Campolide. He becomes the central character to the story. Rodrigues' letters form the first four chapters of the book, whereupon an omniscient narrator takes over the final chapters.

Rodrigues is a young priest who has seen little of the mission field. He does not fully understand the severity of the persecution faced by those in Japan. He still holds lofty beliefs and ideals and has yet to truly come to terms with his own views of Christianity. The ordeals that Rodrigues faces, once he sets foot in Japan, will force him to continually question and re-evaluate his perspective. Rodrigues is also a strong man, who believes firmly in his mission and the man that he seeks. This inner strength aides the young priest in his survival of several prison cells and interrogation at the hands of the evil magistrate, Inoue.

Rodrigues is eager to make contact and learn as much as possible with the villagers at Tomogi. He is excited by their initiative in forming their own administration in lieu of a priest or brother to instruct them. Unlike his companion, Garrpe, who appears more restrained and cautious, Rodrigues is eager to reach out to neighboring villages and increasingly spread God's word. Rodrigues' enthusiasm for assisting the peasants seems to fade when it comes to putting himself in physical danger. There are several instances in which Rodrigues could have saved the lives of Christian villagers, but his



inaction leads to their deaths. The young priest appears more concerned for the preservation of his own image than for that of human lives. This changes throughout the novel, as Rodrigues continues to learn and evolve within this foreign country.

Francisco Garrpe

A good friend of Rodrigues, Garrpe studied under Ferreira at Campolide. Garrpe accompanies Rodrigues to Japan and lives with him in a small hut outside the village of Tomogi. Garrpe appears to be sort of an afterthought or sidekick to Rodrigues' dominating presence. The reader is never given the opportunity to enter Garrpe's mind in order to understand his feelings about being in Japan or this priest's affirmation to his faith. Only through Garrpe's actions does the reader gain a mild perception of this man.

Garrpe is much more cautious than Rodrigues. When the priests hear voices calling to them outside their hut, Garrpe is against opening the door. Garrpe also adheres more faithfully to convictions of his Christian beliefs. Rodrigues quickly tells Mokichi and Ichizo that if they are told to apostatize to do so. Garrpe, however, maintains that there are no circumstances under which people should renounce their faith. Garrpe shows his dedication to the priesthood and Christianity in the final moments of his life. While Garrpe staunchly refuses to apostatize in order to save the lives of Japanese peasants, he drowns in an effort to save them.

Juan de Santa Marta

Santa Marta studied at the seminary of Campolide alongside Garrpe and Rodrigues as a student of Christovao Ferreira. Santa Marta is the third member of the party traveling from Portugal to Japan in search of Ferreira. However, he is unable to continue on the mission past Macao because he falls seriously ill. Once Garrpe and Rodrigues set sail for the Japanese coast the reader learns no more of Santa Marta's fate.

Valignano

Visitor Valignano has been charged with the administration of missionary work in Japan since the beginning of the persecution. Valignano serves as a sort of emissary between the mission work in Japan and the headquarters of the Society of Jesus in Portugal. The reader does not know if Valignano ever set foot on Japanese soil, but he has established a seminary college and mission in Macao, China. Valignano appears to be a source of information and guidance for the three priests. Rodrigues continually refers to conversations he had with Valignano, or to stories the father told him before his departure for Japan. Valignano has a firm knowledge of what is happening in Japan, but does not appear to spend much time working in that particular mission field.



Inoue

Inoue is the Lord of Chikugo and also the newly-appointed magistrate. He is the person responsible for cross examining all high-ranking Christians and executing their torture. Inoue far exceeds the terrifying blood lust of his predecessor and is described by Valignano as a cunning serpent.

When Rodrigues is finally brought before Inoue he fails to recognize the mild mannered old man as the terrible exactor of pain. Rodrigues meets with Inoue several times throughout the story. Each time the two converse with the aide of the translator, and Inoue never appears to be the harsh serpent of legend. Inoue is indeed wise and cunning. He chooses when to utilize force and when to use subtle intimidation on his victims. Inoue can read the captives well and is able to discern which method of torture will eventually break them.

Kichijiro

Kichijiro is a Japanese man whom Rodrigues encounters in Macao. Kichijiro is looking for passage back to Japan. The three priests offer him room on a ship if he will locate a group of Christians to stay with once they land in Japan. Kichijiro is about twenty-nine years old and appears drunk, slovenly, and untrustworthy at their first meeting. He also refuses to divulge his stand on Christianity, which arouses suspicion with Rodrigues.

Kichijiro appears again and again throughout the story. At times he seems to redeem his cowardly actions; but most often he is portrayed as a weakling, unable to stand up for himself or others. Kichijiro repeatedly apostatizes. Whenever he is faced with the fumie, the coward tramples on the image and is pardoned. Rodrigues wonders if Kichijiro is somehow employed by the magistrate to lead others to apostatize. However, there is a deeper level to Kichijiro. Although he refuses to maintain his Christian faith in public, he seeks out Rodrigues to hear his confession following every indiscretion.

Throughout the book the reader wonders about Kichijiro's role in the story. Rodrigues is convinced that the coward is his own personal Judas. Kichijiro certainly fills this role; but as Judas he presents a series of problems for Rodrigues and the reader to try to comprehend. Following Christ's betrayal, Judas hung himself in shame for his actions. He did not return time after time to beg forgiveness of the disciples. Kichijiro's continual reemergence makes the reader question what Christ's response would have been, had Judas sought him out to be forgiven. Rodrigues is unable to come to a conclusion until their final encounter. Kichijiro's final plea for confession shows the priest that he is still needed in Japan and that there is still a small green shoot within the uprooted tree of Christianity.



Mokichi, Ichizo, and Omatsu

Mokichi is an elderly man of the village who seems to function as one of the town leaders. Ichizo is one of the villagers. He is about fifty years old and always appears angry. However, he is very inquisitive and visits the priests almost every night to receive instruction. Omatsu is Ichizo's older sister. She is a widow, but she regularly visits the priests hut to ask questions or bring food. Ichizo and Mokichi volunteer to go as hostages to the magistrate in Nagasaki. They are later brought back to Tomogi and commanded to apostatize. Both men refuse to tread on the image of the Virgin Mary and are staked to poles in the sea where they die after two continual days of exposure.

The Interpreter

The interpreter is never given a proper name. He works for Inoue and often visits Rodrigues, following his capture, in an attempt to get the priest to apostatize. The interpreter appears at times to be a mild mannered man who is merely doing his job; but he does not truly believe in the system which employs him. However, he also appears to relish the torture Rodrigues suffers and adds to it whenever he can. Following Rodrigues' apostasy the interpreter treats the former priest as just another one of Inoue's servants. The interpreter has done his job and now moves on to the next task assigned him by the magistrate.

Monica and Juan

Monica and Juan are two of the captured peasants Rodrigues encounters shortly after his own capture. Monica gives Rodrigues a cucumber to eat and Juan is an elderly man with only one eye. Rodrigues sees the peasants from time to time and is able to converse with them while they work in the fields. He tries to maintain a ministry with them, but he fails to understand that Inoue has linked their fate to his own. If Rodrigues apostatizes the peasants will be set free. However, the priest does not renounce his faith. So the peasants, including Monica and Juan, are executed because of his inaction.



Objects/Places

Nagasaki

Nagasaki is the seat of power for the persecutors where captured priests and brothers are brought to be cross-examined and tortured. Ferreira is said to have apostatized here and no one has heard of him since. It does turn out that the priest did renounce his faith but rather than being set free he lives as a type of servant in Inoue's employ. Inoue lives here. Rodrigues is eventually brought to Nagasaki for questioning before Inoue. He also is given the opportunity to speak with Ferreira and to finally learn the truth about his former teacher.

Macao

This Chinese harbor is where the three Portuguese priests land after leaving Portugal. The city stands at the mouth of the Chu-Kiang River, located on one of the many islands surrounding the bay. The city is large and spreads without distinct boundaries. Here they meet with Valignano, who tells them that further travel into Japan has been suspended. Valignano has been living in Macao for sometime, overseeing the administration of missionaries in Japan. He has established a mission and a college for the teaching of converted Christians.

The Persecution of Japanese Christians

Beginning in about 1587, Japanese Christians were persecuted and tortured for their faith. The current regent Hideyoshi reversed the policy of his predecessor, thereby making the practice of Christianity unlawful in Japan. All those found guilty of continuing to follow the Christian faith were put to death in horrendous ways.

Tomogi

Tomogi is the name of the small village in Japan where Garrpe and Rodrigues land after their journey from Macao. Here the two priests are taken in and hidden in a small charcoal hut. The villagers are practicing Christians who have been able to hide their faith from the Japanese officials. They have devised their own church system since they lack proper administration by a priest. The peasants are very welcoming of the priests and do all they can to protect the men's safety.

The Society of Jesus

The Society of Jesus is the religious order to which Garrpe, Santa Marta, and Rodrigues belong. The society is headquartered in Portugal and is responsible for sending many



missionaries to Japan. The most discussed member is Ferreira, whose sudden disappearance prompts the three young priests to seek him out. Rodrigues sends letters back to his superiors in Portugal with the hope that his reports will also be told to the Church of Rome. The Society of Jesus may be responsible for the education and dissemination of its priests, but the reader may begin to feel that they do little to ensure the protection or aide of those figures suffering in the mission field.

The Letters of Sebastian Rodrigues

Sebastian Rodrigues is the main character of the story. He is one of three priests who travel to Japan in hopes of locating their missing mentor. The first four chapters of the book are excerpts of the letters he writes to his superiors in Portugal. Following his eventual capture by Japanese officials, the letters cease. However, the narrator notes that Rodrigues does manage to obtain bits of paper from his prison guards. On these pieces of paper the priest continues to chronicle what is happening to him. The reader may presume that these fragments survived and this is how the narrator knows what became of Rodrigues.

Fumie

Whenever a person or persons is commanded to apostatize Rodrigues refers to the event as "the fumie." The officials bring forth a picture of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Savior and order the person to set foot on the image. Sometimes simply stepping on the picture is not enough and the officials will also tell the person to spit upon the image. If the person does as they are told they are set free, if they do not, then they are often returned to prison and subjected to more torture.

The Pit

The "pit" is the most referenced form of torture. It is said that Ferreira and many other strong believers renounced their faith after several days suspended in the pit. Captives are bound hand and foot so that they are unable to move. They are then suspended upside down in a pit of boiling water. The prisoners are not completely submerged in the pit but are lowered close enough to the water so that the steam and hot water can splash and burn them. The officials also cut a small slit behind the ear of the person being tortured as a way to release blood and pressure from the person's head. Not many are said to have survived this extreme form of torture.

Portugal

Portugal is the home port for the three priests who venture out in search of Ferreira. It is also the headquarters for the Society of Jesus and for many of the other priests who have worked in the Japanese mission field. Portugal is not the main setting of the story, but figures into the history of the situation. The Japanese have cut ties with Portuguese



merchants and no longer allow Portuguese vessels to sail their waters. This strain has served to increase the trade Portugal conducts with other countries, but has made entrance into Japan extremely difficult for missionaries.

Odomari, Yokose-no-Ura, Unzen, Hirado

These are the names of several villages mentioned throughout the book. Odomari is the village that Rodrigues visits while still living in Tomogi. Two men from Odomari seek out the priests in hopes that one will come to minister to their people. Rodrigues is chosen for this task, while Garrpe remains behind in Tomogi.

Yokose-no-Ura is the site of a once large and bustling Christian port. There was a great Jesuit church built in this town where Japanese Christians would gather to observe religious festivals. When Rodrigues travels through this village on his way to Nagasaki he sees that the place has been abandoned and left to ruin.

Unzen and Hirado are villages that are mentioned, but not visited by any of the characters in the book. These villages are usually used as places to torture or hold captured prisoners. Rodrigues notes that several of the Society of Jesus' priests have been martyred in these cities under various forms of torture.

Themes

The Face of Christ

Rodrigues first mentions his fascination with the face of Christ at the very end of chapter one. There has never been a clear description of Christ's face, but countless artists throughout the ages have tried to capture what they feel best represents the Savior. Rodrigues does not know for sure what the face looks like, but he finds comfort in exploring the possibilities. The priest once saw a depiction of Christ at a seminary that portrayed the Savior as full of strength and vigor. This is the image Rodrigues loves and clings to the most.

At each stage of Rodrigues' time in Japan he compares himself with Christ. He tries to picture how Christ would have looked in the Garden of Gethsemane, during his trial and torture, and dying on the cross. For most of the book it seems that Rodrigues is concerned with the face of Christ because he desires to mirror the Savior's actions. Rodrigues imagines himself a Christ figure and seeks to die as memorable a death as his hero. It makes sense, therefore, that he would want to emulate Christ's physical image. However, Rodrigues' preoccupation with Christ's face makes him forget what is important about the Savior: the love Christ exhibited toward everyone.

When Rodrigues apostatizes, he must step on the face of Christ. The image seems to speak to him, telling the priest that it is okay to do what he has been asked to do. At the same time, the face of Christ provides reassurance and also makes the act even more difficult for Rodrigues. It seems that, in this moment, Rodrigues truly realizes that Christ, not he, is the savior of man. The face of Christ finally breaks its silence. For the rest of his imprisonment Rodrigues continues to contemplate Christ and his face, but his perspective is changed. Now he begins to understand why Christ's face has been so difficult for people to portray. Christ is beyond human understanding and ability, and a face like that is impossible to capture. A face full of that type of vigor and strength is also beyond man's capacity to emulate. Rodrigues is only a human priest and he can only do what is within his human capabilities to achieve.

Silence

Silence is a huge part of this book. At first glance the title seems to imply only one type of silence; but as the reader goes deeper into the story he realizes that there are many types of silence. While each silence is distinct from the others, there is one commonality between them all: each one is a mistaken silence. Rodrigues mistakes the continued suffering of the Japanese peasants as God's silence. Rodrigues believes that his silence will grant him martyrdom.

Throughout most of the book Rodrigues feels abandoned by God. He views the continued persecution of the peasants as a sign that God is silent and no longer listens



to the priest's prayers. There are a few times when something happens to Rodrigues that he begins to feel that God is still listening; but the feeling is short-lived. Rodrigues rails against the God he loves for being so silent while His people are tortured. What Rodrigues does not remember from his training as a priest is that God is never silent. Even when it appears that He is not answering prayers because the outcome the priest longs for does not come; God is still listening and working to help those in need.

At one point the magistrate wants to know why Rodrigues' God would allow so many people to die. Rodrigues tries to argue against this assertion, but in his heart he appears to believe Inoue's words. It is not until the priest apostatizes that he finally understands that God has not been silent. God has been there the whole time protecting Rodrigues and the other believers. God has been there to greet the peasants put to death by Inoue. God has been there to reassure Rodrigues in his darkest hours and to continually forgive him, the way the priest forgives Kichijiro.

Rodrigues becomes angry with God because he feels that God remains silent while so many people are suffering. He feels abandoned and betrayed by the Savior he has devoted his life to. However, when the opportunity comes for Rodrigues to speak up and save the lives of captured peasants, the priest remains silent. Rodrigues believes that his silence is, in reality, helping save his own life. He cannot come to terms with the possibility of sacrificing himself in order to save others. Before his apostasy, Rodrigues is concerned with remaining pure so that he can be martyred. Rodrigues does not understand Garrpe's selfless attempt to save the drowning peasants. He would rather see his friend apostatize and save himself. The moment when Rodrigues apostatizes appears to be the same moment when he realizes his wrongs. Not only has God not been silent, but the priest's silence has not been doing the good that he originally believed.

Betrayal

The Persecution of the Japanese Christians could not have taken place if numerous people had not been willing to betray close friends and family. Some people are naturally weak and are willing to betray others simply to save their own lives. Others are forced into betraying the things that mean the most to them.

The priests in Portugal find it difficult to believe that Ferreira would apostatize. The renowned strength and faith of this devout man seem impossible to break, even by the most feared man in Japan. However, Rodrigues discovers that Ferreira's betrayal of God is misunderstood. The situation in which these priests are placed is so difficult that their actions cannot be reduced to simple betrayal. Rodrigues struggles with this idea for a long time before he realizes that Ferreira did not casually apostatize. By the time Rodrigues apostatizes he has realized that the act of trampling the fumie is really a matter of formality. The Japanese may support this assumption while secretly considering each foot placed on Christ's image a betrayal of Christianity, but it is really what is in each apostate's heart while stepping on the fumie. Rodrigues may have betrayed what he was taught in seminary, but his heart still belongs to God.



Perhaps the most difficult betrayal to understand is that of Kichijiro. This man has been difficult to understand since his first introduction. However, as the reader is given more and more information about Kichijiro, he slowly begins to understand why the man acts as he does. Kichijiro is an example of the weakest human. He could be considered a symbol for all of humanity- continually failing and asking for forgiveness. However the reader chooses to view Kichijiro, it should be noted that the coward teaches a big lesson. Although Kichijiro continues to apostatize, to betray and to be a weakling, he also tries repeatedly to do what is right. Kichijiro seeks forgiveness each time he makes a mistake and, as he watches what happens to those he has betrayed, it appears that Kichijiro comes to understand the deep effects of his own actions. Until the end of his life, Kichijiro tries to make amends for his wrongs. Man does not always change his ways after just one mistake; but trying to better himself throughout his life is acceptable to Christ.



Style

Point of View

The story is told through two different points of view. The first four chapters are written as excerpts from Sebastian Rodrigues' personal letters. This individual attention to the situation allows the reader to become deeply involved in the plight of Japanese Christians. Rodrigues takes the reader into the depths of the Japanese mountains and the interior of the small hut he shares with Garrpe in Tomogi. The reader physically feels the strength of the villagers in the face of such terrible persecution. The reader empathizes with the struggle of the Christian peasants and tries desperately to understand why the government would do such horrendous things to its own people. Endo's use of Rodrigues' letters grabs the reader and forces him to face the truth of the story immediately, rather than allowing the reader to stand away from the violence as a casual observer.

However, Endo abruptly switches tactics in Chapter Five by abandoning the priest's letters. The move from personal to impersonal makes sense, since the priest's capture would have meant an end to his correspondence. The reader is now placed at a distance from the priest's imprisonment and the persecution of peasants. The change in perspective does create a bit of confusion, since the reader is still granted access to Rodrigues' thoughts. The reader is now able to step back and view the situation in a larger scope. It is as if Endo has placed the reader in the position of a local peasant, who is able to view the events of the story first hand without being overburdened by emotion.

Setting

The story takes place in the 1600s during the Japanese Persecution of Christians. The persecution began around the time of the Shimabara Revolution and continued to grow more intense with each new magistrate. Japan has cut all ties with Portuguese traders and priest wishing to enter the country. Christians are not safe at all and must hide from Inoue's officials. Capture usually means certain death, or at least torture, until the prisoner apostatizes.

The story takes place in several different locations in Japan, but the primary settings are the village of Tomogi and a prison hut just outside of Nagasaki. In both instances the descriptions of the scenery are very limited because the priests are confined to their huts. The huts that the priests are kept in are very small, dark structures. They are infested with insects and usually smell like all of the past occupants. The few times when Rodrigues is outside his hut in Tomogi he describes the landscape as green and mountainous. The sea sparkles and shines in the sun, or the moonlight, depending on the time of day. However, when he is forced to travel on foot over the mountains, the



priest finds the land inhospitable and difficult to navigate. Food is scarce and so are sources of clean drinking water.

The villages are crowded with people that are usually hostile to the priest. Rodrigues looks for friendly Christian faces; but the people are either afraid to openly show their friendship for the priest, or they truly dislike the presence of the Christian leader. Rodrigues does not describe the towns as beautiful or interesting. The lack of clear description paints a desolate picture of the Japanese landscape. The one thing that Rodrigues does mention often is that it rains - a lot. The rainy season means confinement to his hut, which usually leads to depression and frustration. The priest notes several rainy seasons throughout the book, making them a predominant feature of Japanese life.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, the language of the story is straight forward and easily understood. Rodrigues' letters are clearly understood and provide a deeper understanding of the priest's situation, as well as, the severity of the Christians' persecution. Even when the author switches to the third person point of view, the reader is still able to follow the priest's thoughts and actions. By distancing the reader from the immediate action, the author allows the reader to gain more perspective on the situation and evaluate the events in a different light.

The prologue is an informative section that is important to the reader's understanding of the story. Without this necessary background information, the reader would become easily confused about the major characters and events of the story. The final chapter, however, presents a challenge for the reader. The diary of the Dutch clerk does allow the reader to know the fates of Rodrigues, Ferreira, and Kichijiro; but the way the chapter is presented is confusing. The journal entries record everyday life and make the two priests' involvement in the trials of confiscated Christian items seem as if they are trying to break away from Inoue's power. The clearest fact that stands out from this final chapter is that Rodrigues did not apostatize in his heart; and while he may no longer be technically a priest, he is still a Christian.

Structure

The story is told in ten chapters with a prologue and an appendix. There is also a translator's prologue, which provides the reader with the historical background of the book. Each chapter is numbered but has no title to provide the reader with clues about the contents of the chapter.

Most of the chapters are rather long in page numbers; but the action of the story carries the reader quickly through the book. The first four chapters are apparent excerpts from Sebastian Rodrigues' letters to the Church in Rome. Since these chapters are pieces of letters, there is a personal quality to the narration. The reader is able to closely follow the emotions and empathize with the character's trials. Chapters Five through Nine are



told from the third person point of view. The reader becomes an outside observer, watching the events as they happen, but feeling little emotional connection with the characters. The reader's relationship with Sebastian Rodrigues is removed several degrees; but this removal allows the reader to focus on the plight of other minor characters. The reader is also able to reflect on and consider his previous notions of Rodrigues' character and to more closely evaluate the priest's words and actions.

The only thing that the reader may have difficulty with in this book is keeping the many names straight. The Japanese city names and names of people can be confusing, as they sound very similar. The reader may have to flip back and forth to remember who is being spoken about and where the action is taken place. However, this bit of confusion does not impair the reader's understanding of the main idea of the book.



Quotes

"Christovao Ferreira, sent to Japan by the Society of Jesus in Portugal, after undergoing the torture of 'the pit' at Nagasaki had apostatized." Prologue, pg. 3

"Quite unlike his predecessor Takenaka, he was cunning as a serpent so that the Christians who until now had not flinched at threats and tortures succumbed one by one to his cunning wiles." Chapter 1, pg. 15

"It is true, of course, that there are Japanese who have endured torture for five days on end without wavering in their fidelity; but there are also cowardly weaklings like Kichijiro." Chapter 1, pg. 20

"What did the face of Christ look like? This point the Bible passes over in silence." Chapter 1, pg. 22

"It is not impossible that there are still Christians in the villages and islands west of Tomogoi, but under the circumstances we cannot so much as stir outside our hut during the day." Chapter 2, pg. 30

"Never have I felt so deeply how meaningful is the life of a priest." Chapter 3, pg. 31

"Men are born in two categories: the strong and the weak, the saints and the commonplace, the heroes and those who respect them." Chapter 4, pg. 77-78

"While he was being dragged here children and adults alike, dressed in rags, had kept staring at him with glimmering eyes like animals from between the thatch-roofed huts." Chapter 5, pg.79

"Peasants cannot think for themselves. Even if they talk the thing over they will come to no conclusion." Chapter 5, pg. 84

"If it is true that God is really loving and merciful, how do you explain the fact that he gives so many trials and sufferings of all kinds to man on his way to Heaven?" Chapter 5, pg. 90

"From childhood the face of Christ had been for him the fulfillment of his every dream and ideal." Chapter 6, pg. 103

"Even though Christ prayed, Judas had hanged himself in the field of blood - and had Christ prayed for Judas?" Chapter 6, pg. 114

"There was Navarro who at Shimabara was roasted alive with fire; there were Carvalho and Gabriel who were immersed again and again in the boiling sulphur water at Unzen; there were those missionaries deprived of food in the prison of Omura until they died of starvation." Chapter 7, pg. 125



"Since coming to Japan, it was practically only in this prison that he had had the chance to live the life of a priest." Chapter 7, pg. 126

'At least Garrpe was clean. But you...you...you are the most weak-willed. You don't deserve the name of "father".' Chapter 7, pg. 134



Topics for Discussion

How does the Japanese persecution of Christians compare to other religious persecution in different countries?

Discuss some of the meanings of the word "silence" in the book.

What does Ferreira's apostatizing mean to the mission of the Portuguese missionaries?

Why do you think Rodrigues never makes a move to help the peasants thrown over the side of the boat to drown?

Why does Kichijiro continually aide, and then betray, the priests?

Endo's book is considered a novel. What impact does this classification have on the significance of the story?

How does Inoue compare to Adolf Hitler?

In Chapter Five, Monica, one of the peasant captives, says that they do not fear death because they would welcome the paradise of Heaven. Rodrigues is upset with her description of Heaven. Why do you think he reacts in this way?

Rodrigues constantly compares himself to Christ and his situation to that of the crucifixion. Are the situations really the same, or is Rodrigues suffering from a delusion in which he seeks a glorious martyrdom for himself?

The reader assumes that the book is non-fiction, but the translator's prologue refers to Endo's work as a novel. How does this distinction affect the reader's perception of truth within the story?

In Chapter Seven, Rodrigues notes that the only time he has felt like a priest is during his time in prison. What does he mean by this statement and what effect do his words have on the time he spent ministering in Tomogi and Odomari?

How does Rodrigues' capture and time in prison compare to the Jews confinement in concentration camps? How do you think you would have coped if you were Rodrigues, given your own personal beliefs?

In your opinion who do you consider to be the most "weak-willed": Kichijiro, who is at least consistent in his cowardice, or Rodrigues, who dreams of being a great priest and martyr but never acts to help those in need?