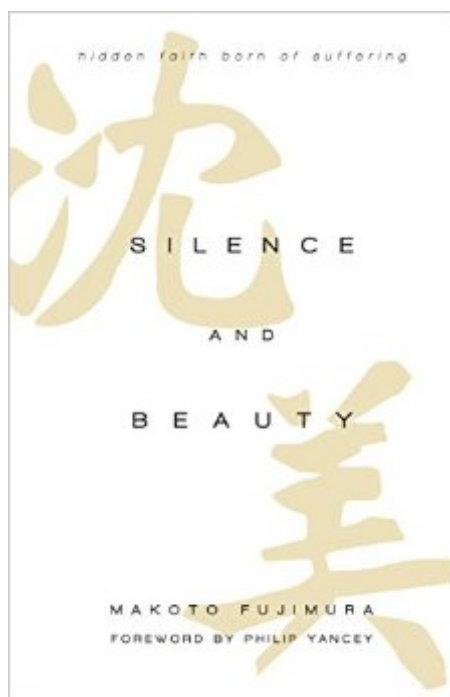


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Silence And Beauty: Hidden Faith Born Of Suffering



Synopsis

Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence*, first published in 1966, endures as one of the greatest works of twentieth-century Japanese literature. Its narrative of the persecution of Christians in seventeenth-century Japan raises uncomfortable questions about God and the ambiguity of faith in the midst of suffering and hostility. Endo's *Silence* took internationally renowned visual artist Makoto Fujimura on a pilgrimage of grappling with the nature of art, the significance of pain and his own cultural heritage. His artistic faith journey overlaps with Endo's as he uncovers deep layers of meaning in Japanese history and literature, expressed in art both past and present. He finds connections to how faith is lived in contemporary contexts of trauma and glimpses of how the gospel is conveyed in Christ-hidden cultures. In this world of pain and suffering, God often seems silent. Fujimura's reflections show that light is yet present in darkness, and that silence speaks with hidden beauty and truth.

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Customer Reviews

SILENCE AND BEAUTY is an elegant book in both its form and its content. This is one book for which you might want to get the print edition, even if you typically buy Kindle books, as it is a hardcover with vellum dustjacket, and color artwork on the endpapers and inside the book. 2016 is a banner year for Shusaku Endo's extraordinary novel SILENCE. Not only is this the 50th anniversary of the book's release, the launch of Martin Scorsese's long-awaited film adaptation is also scheduled for later this year. Given these special occasions, the time is right for a

companion book like Makoto Fujimura's SILENCE AND BEAUTY, and few – if any – other commentators are as well suited to reflect on the novel as Fujimura, a noted Japanese-American visual artist, whose work, like Endo's, is deeply rooted in his Christian faith. SILENCE AND BEAUTY will best be read by readers who are familiar with Endo's novel, or at least those who are reading the two books in tandem. "SILENCE," Fujimura writes, "is an artistic expression that moves us into the darkness of our Ground Zero conditions." But beyond the trauma of our Ground Zeroes, we find the beauty of the gospel that heals and restores. Fujimura's work is not a commentary on the novel, but rather a poignant reflection his personal experiences (including being in the heart of NYC on 9/11) and those of Japanese culture both historically (in the early modern age in which Endo's SILENCE is set) and more recently (including the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Fujimura deftly layers these stories on top of the other, as he would layer strokes of paint in one of his paintings in the traditional Japanese nihonga style, creating a wondrous work that reflects the beauty of God's redemption of our fragmented world.

Silence by Shusaku Endo is one of those books that is not easily forgotten. I read it a couple years ago and I rarely go more than a couple weeks without referencing it. Makoto Fujimura is a very well known artist, famous in many Evangelical circles for being a famous artist that is well known outside of Christian circles. Fujimura grew up in the US, but after college was accepted into a Japanese graduate program to study art. The first student to ever be accepted into this graduate program that did not grow up through the Japanese national art system. Fujimura became a Christian while studying art in Japan, a country with a very low rate of Christians. Silence and Beauty is an interesting book. It opens with a bit of spiritual memoir. Fujimura details how Shusaku Endo and his book Silence impacted his early faith. And unsurprisingly there is a long exploration of both Endo and Silence. That is done in the context of a rich sociological and historical study of Japan. And all of that is wrapped up in a defense of beauty and art as essential to Christianity. (I was reminded at times of Francis Spufford's Unapologetic and Brian Zhand's Beauty Will Save the World.) At this point, this is the best book I have read this year. I have not previously read anything by Fujimura. But I will read more. I have ordered Silence so I can re-read it. (Silence is not available on Kindle, and I previously listened to the audiobook, so I have ordered the paperback.) Once I am done I am going to re-read Silence and Beauty again. I am not going to detail the book much more this time, but will write another review later. As a note, this is a nicely designed hardcover book. There is a velum looking dustcover and several pages of color art in the middle of the book.

C.S. Lewis described our world as “the Kingdom of Noise,” and he composed a psalm in the praise of noise from the pen of Senior Tempter, Screwtape, in his letter to a young apprentice. By contrast, artist Makoto Fujimura praises the beauty of silence particularly in the context of Japanese culture. “Perhaps in no other culture is a single word so relevant as silence is to Japan. In Japan, silence is beauty and beauty is silent.” In his analysis of Shusako Endo’s global best-seller, *Silence*, Fujimura deals with the book’s uneasy questions about the nature of suffering, faith, betrayal, and service to a God who, at times, chooses to remain silent. Set in the 17th century during a period of intense persecution of Christians, *Silence* traces the ministry of Father Sebastian Rodrigues, a Portuguese priest who traveled to Japan to investigate rumors that a senior missionary had apostatized under torture. As a bicultural Japanese American, Makoto Fujimura is uniquely positioned to ponder Endo’s assertion that Christianity is ill-suited to take root in the “mud swamp” of Japan — especially since this is where his own faith journey began. As an artist who paints using layers of metal and natural pigments to create visual beauty, he is also uniquely qualified to probe the layers of meaning in Endo’s narrative arc.

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