

The Absurd Silence

—The Analysis on the Faith and Silence in <Silence>written by Shusaku

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Abstract: Shusaku Endo tells about the process that the priest named Sebastio Rodrigues from Jesus of Portugal comes to Japan with the faith that looking for his teacher called Ferreira and spreading the Catholic to the Japanese people, and then be arrested; in order to save the people being punished, Sebastio Rodrigues abandons his religion under the persuasion of others. The analysis from the perspective of “the silence of sea”、”the silence of God”、”the silence of the oppressed” will help us understand deeply about the “Silence” characterized by Shusaku Endo.

On the whole, Shusaku Endo has described a picture named “how the Catholics give up their religion” in his book called <Silence>. The priest Ferreira who contributes to the expedition of Sebastio Rodrigues in the beginning of the article, and the Japanese native “Catholic” Yoji Ro, or Sebastio Rodrigues who with faith in his heart all choose to give up their religion with no exception in the end, whether it is voluntary or forced. What accompanied by the course of all these happening is the melody of “silence”. Whether the silence of the God or the silence of the people, both directly or indirectly contributed to this result.

1 The silence of the God

It is the inspiration and the motivation from the God that encourage Sebastio Rodrigues to travel vast distances across the seas to Japan to do missionary work. However, when Sebastio Rodrigues does the missionary work and has been tortured in the end, he experiences the silence of the God. Perhaps it is the silence of the God that leads to the final outcome no matter it is voluntary or forced.

In the letter (1) of Sebastio Rodrigues, we can find that he feels the blessing of the God, and the faith in heart is also firm. “Only Francis Kalba and I have been truly entertained at this missionary institute, we have plenty of energy”. About the first time when Sebastio Rodrigues felt the silence of the God, the article describes as follow: “ I feel the silence of the God behind the terrible silence of the sea — — the God is still indifferent to people’s moan”.^[1] Why Sebastio Rodrigues has this kind of feeling? The villagers named Mokichi and Ichizo of Yoshimura are arrested in order to protect Sebastio Rodrigues and Francis Kalba. They are tied to stakes in the sea to endure the erosion of the sea and the beating of the waves. They died in the end because of the religion. In the same time, what Sebastio Rodrigues only can do is that pray to God without stopping hoping Mokichi and Ichizo can go to heaven. At this very moment, Sebastio Rodrigues who with firm belief suddenly feel a trace of sadness, “ everything has not changed, you might say

that their death are meaningful. It will be the foundation of the religion. The God will never give us trial beyond ourselves. Mokichi and Ichizo now may be by the side of the Lord”.[2]

What accompanied with the process about Sebastio Rodrigues’s missionary work and sufferings are his skepticism to the “silence of the God” and the inner helplessness. “I know the greatest sin is the despair of the God, however, i do not know why God is silent.” “ Oh the master of the Lord, please move from your holy land to this place quickly to protect the people here. My God, why do you keep silent? Why do you keep silent? He murmured.” “The Lord will not desert you forever. He will wash our wounds. He will stretch out his hand and dry the blood. The Lord will not be silent forever.” Moreover, after the meeting between Sebastio Rodrigues and Ferreira, Ferreira’s words at the beginning have never changed Sebastio Rodrigues’s thinking. But the dialogue on the Lord latter contributes to Sebastio Rodrigues’s renounce. “ I abandon the religion not just because I stand in the strappado. I abandon the religion because the God is not taking any action when his believers are in the groan. I pray desperately, but the God has no representation.” All these statements let Rodrigues look back upon the death and pain he suffered and saw with his own eyes in Japan. The God is silent when the religious believers breathe their last; the God is silent in the sea with raining; the God is silent when the one eyed man was murdered in the courtyard of the sun’s rays.

In the end, Sebastio Rodrigues break out his anger when he is imprisoned in the prison. Because he is angry to the God’s silence. Because he is helpless. He will not stand the God put the sufferings to the common people who has already been afflicted by the controllers. Therefore, Sebastio Rodrigues makes his own voice, “this sad world is of great sin. Yet dear Lord, but you still worldly-wise and play safe,keeping silent!” It is too absurd! Sebastio Rodrigues choose to abandon the religion in the end. But is it the renounce in the true sense? Of course not.

It is only a surface form of Sebastio Rodrigues’s renounce. What he betray in actually is just the most common external form of Christian faith. In realty, Sebastio Rodrigues has never give up his stick to the faith itself. On one level, it is the silence of the God that lead Sebastio Rodrigues to find the true meaning of his belief. He find the real “God” in the end—— “in this country (Japan), I am still the last Catholic priest.” “Even if the God is silent, my life itself has been telling the God.” From all these words, we can see that Rodrigues finally recognize the “silent God”——the essence of his own faith is actually his own. The God in his heart is only a form of religion. What supports his own is himself. As long as his faith is not silent, the “God” itself will never be silent.

2 The Silence of the Sea

The sea is just one of the many elements in text. Instead of making an analysis on “the silence of sea”, the text will make a analysis on many of the images in the paper.

(1) The Sea

There are so many descriptions about the sea, and most of the descriptions are constructing an atmosphere that is miserable and dangerous. “The sound of the waves in the dark is so low as the drum. The waves are beating and then fading out. The waves are flushing with the corpses of Mokichi and Ichizo. After their death, their vacant expressions are expanding constantly in the sea. The God and the sea still keep silent, keep silent.” There are too many descriptions such like this in the text. It is a corresponding between the vast expanse of the sea and the Sebastio Rodrigues’s fear in his heart. The sea swallows up so many dead bodies of Catholic believers. But it is as usual as the before. The silence of the sea and the silence of the God are agree with each other. This kind of silence makes people tremble with fear.

(2) The fly

There are many scenes describing the fly in the text of <Silence>. In the faith of Christianity, the fly is the symbol of the “devil”, and also it is the representatives of the sin. “Evil is not only a kind of personal consciousness, but also a common sense related to all people. Although evil is inevitable, this kind of negative consciousness lets us feel what should not be held that the position stands against the God and the position that maintain our own.”[3] All people are sinful, priest included. Therefore, the fly Sebastio Rodrigues’s sees when he is imprisoned in the cell represents a profound meaning. As the incarnation of the devil, the fly is flying in and out before Sebastio Rodrigues’s eyes. It means the fly is spying upon the crack in Sebastio Rodrigues’s heart. The description to fly here is on behalf of that the devil is always tempting the priest and always be forced back by the faith in Sebastio Rodrigues’s heart.

(3) The Quiet

The quiet may not be a element, but the things in nature that creates a quiet atmosphere make a comparison with the “silence”. “The sunshine is bright, it is shining the grass and the hut made by small brunch. I have never expected the days be arrested with fear and upset are so peaceful like this.”[4] This kind of scene described in the text build a quiet atmosphere. Bright sunlight is most common in daily life. However the “ bright sunlight” here is not just the description of nature scenery. The sunlight here is the symbol of “God of Light”. It is the sunlight that through the darkness controlled by devil and give hopes to the believers. As described in the end of text, “Sebastio Rodrigues is walking slowly with staggering step. Now, the icon is at his feet. The weak sunshine at dawn is shining the priest’s exposed neck that thin as the rooster neck.” In Christianity, the rooster is also a kind of metaphor.[5] It stands for the arrive of the God Light. It indicates the come of a new day. Sebastio Rodrigues has gained a new life the time when he steps on the icon with his own feet. He will never be constrained by the outer frame of the God. His inner world has got the real liberation. His real life begins.

3 The Silence of the Oppressed

The “silence of the oppressed” here refers to the numb villagers controlled by the high pressure firstly. “The black brown flame is shaking in the dusk just like the living things. At the same time, around here is a peace of silence just like the village and villagers accept the pain dumbly.” Their resistances couldn’t bring them out because of the harsh system. They can only linger on the suffering. Keeping silence is the only way to survive. The silence here is not only shown as they have no ambition to enhance the quality of their own living environment, but also shown as they have no care to anyone in addition to themselves. They have no faith.

Simultaneously, in addition to Sebastio Rodrigues, villagers and the controllers, there is also a man with a certain degree of negative character named Yoji Ro. When his family members choose to die for the religion, he chooses to abandon the religion by trampling the statue of the Virgin Mary. When he faces persecution, he chooses to betray Sebastio Rodrigues just like Judah betrayed Jesus. However, he speaks his mind with criticism time and time again. He wants to join the religion again and again to accept the baptism and penance. Yoji Ro makes the impressions that are wretched, timid and not reliable. But when Sebastio Rodrigues is arrested, he goes to the prison to shout to Sebastio Rodrigues “ I was born as a weak man! I will be a good Christian if I hadn’t lived in the age of persecution. I was born as a weak man! I am a person who is weak in spirit. I do not dare to die for the faith. What should I do? Oh dear, why I was born into the world?” To a certain extent, the disaster not only destroys people’s material life ,but also destroyed the people’s spiritual world and the field of human nature. Yoji Ro such seemingly helpless debate has also demonstrated the persecution of his heart.

In the traditional culture of the Christianity, death is usually the most common way to salvation. And the death is a kind of solemn ceremony. The life of the believer without purpose can be converted to values of the life through this ceremony.[6] It is worthy of being praised if someone chooses to sacrifice itself in order to be faithful to its own ideals. However, expect for those who are in great sacrifice, there is also another kind of people in the world just as the Yoji Ro. The man who do not abandon their faith, who are unwilling to face the ridiculous reality, who are unwilling to admit that the God is hateful, who die in humiliation are actually committed suicide. The man just as Yoji Ro who are despised, even reviled, also experience the sufferings of the heart when they choose to abandon their belief. Just as the book rightly states, “ who dares to assert that the weak must be less painful than the strong?” Sticking to the faith is the moral of those who choose to die for the religion, but the moral of humble existence is not believing in the existence of evil. [7] The man who abandon their believes could not find their position of identity in the long river of history. They are unassisted. They are not the epic hero who devotes to their faith. There is not a narrative way to tell their stories in the development process of history. Therefore, they only have to keep silence.

After all, just as the book rightly states, “there are not only saints and heroes in the world.” The believers will not have to abandon their faith or give up their lives if they do not live the age full of persecution. They can have their own faith freely. In this way, people do not have to struggle for being the strong or being the weak. What they should do is just sticking to their own beliefs to be a simple believer.

4 Summary

“The crime is not as the average people imagine, just the theft, lying and other acts. A person is involved in another person’s life but he forgets the constant departure and reunion of another people, it is crime.”[9] The Lord has given all his followers a belief, but he takes the way of silence to deal with his believers. When the man who abandon their lives to preserve the loyalty are appreciated by others, the people just as Yoji Ro who save themselves by abandoning the faith on the surface are facing the injustice narrative of the history. Is this the gospel or the disaster that the Lord brings to them?

The references

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