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THUNDEROUS SILENCE – CHRISTIANITY AT THE TIME OF PERSECUTION IN JAPAN

Abstract

Although Japan has been primarily identified in Western cinema with the Hollywood hits of the last twenty years – The Last Samurai (2003), Memoirs of a Geisha (2005) and Clint Eastwood's films Flags of our Fathers and Letters with Ivo Jima (2006), this country, through the achievements of the Tenth Muses, has actually been present for almost hundred years. This image changed for obvious reasons – not only has knowledge about Japan evolved, due to the political conditions through which the West viewed this country, but also the approach of the observers themselves, who initially researched Orientalism, characteristic of the beginning of the 20th century, but over time they more or less took care to replace the works of their own imagination with the author's impressions and observations (in A. Vosinjska, Japan and the Japanese in Western Cinematography, in Views – Japan in the eyes of the West, the West in the eyes of Japan: 2015: 115).1 The creation of an image of Japan (sometimes fresh and sometimes stereotypical) certainly contributed to the screen adaptation of books by Japanese authors, although even then the directors could more or less stick to the book and insert their own view of the topic in their film or, on the other hand, they openly side with "one side" by looking at

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[1] A. Vosinjska (2015), *Japan and the Japanese in Western Cinematography, in Views – Japan in the eyes of the West, the West in the eyes of Japan*, 115.

an event from the point of view of Westerners, thereby losing objectivity.

Keywords: *Japan, Christianity, Silence.*

It is necessary for us to be spiritually awake while there is still time, so that we do not lack capability of finding what we are looking for.

St. Nectarios of Aegina

In 2016, the American director Martin Scorsese filmed the historical drama *Silence* based on the novel by the Japanese author Shusaku Endo.[2] The story follows two Portuguese Jesuit priests who struggle with various forms of persecution, including torture, as they travel through Japan to reunite with their teacher, who they hear has renounced the faith. According to the director himself, he prepared for the filming of this film for 30 years; the film was shot in Chinese Taipei, and deals with the issue of Christians in Japan during the 16th and 17th centuries. After first reading Shyusaku's novel in the late 80s, the director read that novel countless times. Scorsese's Silence is the second adaptation of this novel, as a Japanese version directed by Masahiro Shinoda was previously filmed in 1971. In an interview on the occasion of the premiere of Scorsese's Silence, he said: "I knew right away that I wanted to turn the book into a film. I think it was instinctive, because when I was doing research for The Last Temptation, Streets of Evil, Raging Bull and all the other films, I was going towards crystallizing and sensitizing into this story."

On the other hand, Shusaku Endo was a Christian and was the first Japanese writer who tried to write objectively about the Christian faith. "I was baptized as a child and Catholicism for me is like a ready-made suit that I had to wear and didn't even have the chance to try on. When I grew up I had to decide whether to keep the suit on or take it off and find something more suitable. There were really times when I just wanted to throw my faith away. But after much hesitation, I was unable to do so. She penetrated so deeply into me that she became a part of me. Today, however, precisely because of that, I think that in fact my true self does not exist, because a large part of my personality is entangled in my Catholicism."[3]

[2] Šjusaku Endo (1988), *Ćutanje*, Sloboda, Beograd.

[3] *Ibid*, 215.

Silence is a novel that at the time of its publication in 1966 caused a storm and excitement among Japanese readers because in those years Japan was still recovering from the Second World War and the newly healed complex of a defeated country rushing to meet the West with great strides. The first successes of Japanese agriculture restored confidence to the Japanese, and they felt the same in Endo's novel, where the "Japanese swamp" defeats the seemingly strong missionary faith. A million members of the Christian community in Japan protested, but many more thanked Endo for his "objective writing" precisely because they remembered that he was also a Christian.

The theme of the novel, and therefore of the film, is certainly deep, it raises centuries-old questions – tricky, but also susceptible to politicization and manipulation. *Since* it is a historical drama, the film/book is an excellent depiction of life and the socio-political situation in the Japanese state of the 17th century. On the other hand, the emphasis is on the internal struggle and development of the main character – priest Sebastian Rodriguez. Also, the story and message of the film can be understood in many ways precisely because it shows a difficult period in Japanese history, but without showing what preceded it and what led to it. In this sense, the goal of this paper is to describe the socio-political circumstances of the period before the persecution of Christians and what, according to the available data, led to it, through a brief presentation of the book and the film (which, surprisingly, until the very end, faithfully follows the book).

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN

Christianity was brought to Japan by Francisco Xavier (1505-1552), a Jesuit who later became known as St. Francis. In the Middle Ages, the Jesuits had penetrated deeply into Asia and had a strong foothold in Goa. Xavier landed in Kagoshima in 1549 and was quickly captivated by the Japanese. He called them "the joy of his heart".[4] He singled out the Japanese from all the Asian peoples, claiming that with their gentleness and intelligence, they were the closest to God of all the non-Christians he had met until then, despite the language barrier – in a short time he had baptized several hundred Japanese. Thus, the seeds sown quickly bore fruit. Thirty years later, the Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano found 150,000 Christians in Japan.

[4] Šjusaku Endo (1988), *Ćutanje*, Sloboda, Beograd, 217.

In Japan, the 16th century was an age of civil wars in which the incessant clashes between nobles, without a strong central government to restrain them, literally destroyed the country. The age of insecurity contributed to the fact that faith in a god who promises a better life after death made Christianity attractive not only to the peasants and citizens who suffered the most because of the wars, but also to the nobility itself. Christian missionaries brought with them goods from Europe that attracted feudal lords, especially firearms whose possession could decide the outcome of a battle. The first Japanese magnate who managed to 'pacify' the missionaries and achieve some sort of central government was Oda Nobunaga. Missionaries gained a decisive influence on the military government in Edo (today's Tokyo) so that Catholic priests argued equally with the shoguns and their officials. That is why the letters and notes of missionaries from that era are the most important sources for historians studying events in Japan at the end of the 16th century. The military strongman, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, was the first to sense the danger posed by the influence of foreign clergy and ordered the expulsion of Christians from Japan. The central government was not strong enough to fully implement his order, so many missionaries managed to stay in the country. In 1597, Hideyoshi suddenly ordered 26 Christians, Japanese and European, to be publicly crucified on crosses in Nagasaki. Strong persecution of adherents of a foreign faith began. After Hideyoshi, shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu continued the persecution of missionaries and the 'hunt' for Christians, and his 'mission' was continued with even greater ferocity by his son Hidetada and grandson Iemitsu, who forbade the entry of foreigners into Japan and the departure of Japanese from the island. In forty years, out of 300,000 Christians in Japan, no more than 5-6,000 hidden believers remained.

Christianity freely returned to Japan only in the 19th century when the young samurai movement managed to transfer power from the shogun to the emperor and open Japan to the world. Then, under Emperor Meiji, the so-called Restoration took place. After almost three centuries, Japan was back on the world map.

THE POLITICAL SCENE IN JAPAN AT THE END OF THE 15TH AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 16TH CENTURY

The period from the end of the 15th to the end of the 16th century in Japanese history is known as the ***Sengoku jidai*** – the Warring

States Period. It begins with the Onin War (1467), when in a few years there was almost no province in Japan that was exempt from the armed conflict of feudal lords or church leaders, until 1568, when Oda Nobunaga marched victoriously into Kyoto. Until the end of the 15th century, Japan exhibited a kind of truncated feudalism. The regional hierarchy was complete, but the national hierarchy was topless, since neither the emperor nor the shogun could impose their will on regional lords who, although they might profess allegiance to the throne or shogunate, were in fact autonomous princes, holding their own land, governing their vassals, maintaining their armies and enforcing their laws.

In the first half of the 16th century, a process of destruction took place in Japan. The previous groups were broken up, their units rearranged, if not destroyed. As the weaker elements were removed from the struggle, some reunification took place (before 1560), the conflict broke down into rivalries of some six groups, and ended (by 1600), with the supremacy of one (the Tokugawa clan). The restoration of a stable central government was carried out by great men who were gifted with the talents needed at the time: Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616).

In order to establish a centralized government, Oda Nobunaga began to deal with rivals, but also to subjugate and appease some warlike Buddhist sects. Although there is very little record of persecution in Japan based on the doctrine itself, the entire medieval history of the country shows that its feudal statesmen would never allow religious institutions to interfere in major political matters.[5] Having stopped, if not completely crushed, the resistance of the (Buddhist) clerics, Nobunaga and his lieutenants were left to subdue the great chieftans in central and western Japan. One of the reasons why Nobunaga was favorable towards the Jesuit missionaries is certainly that they shared intolerance towards the Buddhist monks.[6] The missionaries were useful to him and indulged him, he was more interested in their lay teaching than dogma, he talked with them about the opportunities in the West and liked to receive gifts from them (of course, products from the West).

After Nobunaga's sudden death, the task of unifying Japan and bringing it under central government was continued by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He did not change in his treatment of the Jesuits, but in 1587 he suddenly issued a decree expelling them all from Japan (although he

[5] Džordž Sansom (2023), *Kratka istorija Japana*, Kokoro, Beograd, 341.
[6] *Ibid*, 351.

carefully emphasized that Portuguese merchants could continue their work), and in 1588 he passed the famous Law on Confiscation of Arms (the so-called "Hunting for Swords") thereby disarming peasants throughout the country. His sudden attitude about changing sides must have been political – the missionaries were rapidly winning over feudal lords, and some of the strongest and most capable military leaders. This "caused Hideyoshi to fear that Christianity would unite his vassals against him".[7]

After Hideyoshi's death, his system of government fell apart due to the conflict of ambitious vassals. The most powerful among them was Tokugawa Ieyasu. At first, he showed the same tolerance towards the Jesuits, and for the same economic reasons. Nevertheless, over time, as the ruler of Japan, he had the opportunity to witness the intrigues by which the Jesuits excluded the Spaniards, and the pressure exerted by the Spanish to exclude the Dutch. He learned of bitter quarrels between the Franciscans and the Dominicans. He discovered that one of his officials was conspiring against him with some converted feudal lords and foreigners; he heard of a fleet of Spanish warships anchored in Manila; learned about the spies who were sent to Europe and about the ambitions of the Christian monarchs and the pride of the Roman Church. Then he decided to act decisively.

The Tokugawa ***Shogun***, as the most powerful figure in the military regime, supervised local lords and religious temples, established military and financial policies, and thus kept the entire territory of the country under his rule. The shogun himself was responsible for implementing foreign policy measures such as negotiations with other countries, banning Christianity, controlling foreign trade and limiting the departure of Japanese people abroad. His most important right was that he was the supreme owner of the entire territory. The shogun rarely interfered in the internal affairs of the area, but he strictly demanded that all lords adhere to several basic political principles and regulations, which was clearly stated in the Warrior Code, which states: "All problems in the country must be solved in accordance with the laws of Edo." Ieyasu increasingly suspected that Christianity might pose a political threat to the Tokugawa regime, an attitude held by Japanese rulers for centuries (and confirmed by Nobunaga's crackdown on warlike Buddhist sects). Japanese rulers did not interfere with religion as long as religion did not interfere with government. However, the persecution of Christians intensified over time, and although foreign missionaries were tortured and

[7] *Ibid*, 352.

killed only years after the edict (the first priest was executed in 1617), Japanese converts had a much harder time. Thus, this persecution began mildly and cautiously, and in the end, unfortunately, "in its ferocity it rivaled, if not surpassed, any such horror that took place in the West".[8]

POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL IN THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES

The Venetian traveler Marco Polo was the first to arouse the attention and curiosity of Europeans for the Land of the Rising Sun. His mention of Japan (or Cipangu, as he called it) is the first mention of this country in European languages, and his Oriental Travels were translated into Latin in 1298. Being a prisoner of Kublai Khan (1275–1292) for 17 years, he had the opportunity to witness the failed Mongol invasion of Japan when their fleet was swept to the bottom of the Genkai Sea. Because of the exaggerated descriptions of the treasures in Japan (luxurious palaces encrusted with gold, lots of pearls with which to bury their dead, etc.) greedy European kings placed Japan on their map of countries to be conquered and exploited. Some believe that even Columbus was inspired to undertake his epoch-making journey by studying the work of Marco Polo in his desire to reach China and Tsipanga (i. e. China and Japan).

One of the Western peoples to whom Marco Polo gave an additional, if not the main, incentive for his political and commercial activities in the East, were certainly the Portuguese. After that, the connection between Portugal and Japan became fruitful, to their mutual benefit. Although Portugal was reluctant to help Columbus, who then found his benefactor in the Spanish court, this tiny kingdom was at the forefront of European progress and trade with its maritime discoveries for the next two centuries.

At the time when the subjects of Portugal in the East came into contact with Japan for the first time (through two Japanese who accompanied Mendez Pinto to Malaga) Portugal was ruled by one of the least tolerant kings who ascended his throne. It was João III (1521–1557) who introduced the Inquisition into his kingdom in 1536, and the same 'religious' fervor prompted him to impose the Christianization of his subjects in the East. In order to carry this out, a strong, fearless and effective missionary organization was necessary.

[8] *Ibid*, 356.

It was at this point that Ignatius Loyola presented to the Pope his draft of regulations for his proposed Society of Jesus. When he was refused, the Portuguese king asked Loyola through his ambassador in the Vatican that he and some priests from his Order work for Portugal and its possessions in India. In March 1540, the Portuguese Rodríguez and the Spaniard who was later canonized as Saint Francisco Xavier were sent to the Portuguese king who put the latter in charge of the Indian Mission. While in 1542 Mendez Pinto was on his way from Tanegashima to the court of Bungo to impress the feudal lord and his subjects with the potential of the matchmaker, the famous Jesuit was on his journey to Goa (an Indian city on the Malabar coast where, at his persuasion, the king would introduce the Inquisition in 1560). He stayed there until 1545, when he came to Malaga. He met a converted Japanese, and with several Japanese converts and his assistants, he landed in Kagoshima in 1549, which was the first arrival of missionaries in Japan. Thus, in the so-called 'Age of Discovery' Portugal was a great economic, political and cultural power, creating the Portuguese Empire that stretched from Brazil, through Africa, India and China to East Timor in Indonesia.

From the very beginning, the desire for Western novelties was the main reason why the Japanese welcomed Christian missionaries. Over time, the not-so-good intentions of some missionaries were revealed – a strong rivalry developed between the Jesuits and the Franciscans and Dominicans who plotted against each other; then a Spanish admiral, desiring to intimidate the Japanese interlocutors, showed on a map a vast area in the dominions of Philip II, saying that their king in the foreign countries he wished to conquer first sent missionaries to induce the people to embrace their religion, and then sent military troops who easily perform further work; then a Spaniard recklessly discovered the existence of a large number of ships that had then sailed to Manila from New Spain (that the entire fleet contained only weapons and soldiers for the conquest of the Moluccas), as well as the fact that a defeated Dutch ship on which the chief helmsman was docked in Japan Will Adams, an Englishman from Kent who further conveys news of the battles between the Spanish and the Portuguese to the Shogun. Thus, during the time of the second Tokugawa Shogun Hidetada, there was a real danger in the empire that he perceived, if not in the presence of Christians, then in the presence of Europeans.

By then the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English were all competing for trading privileges, each group all too ready to slander

the other's countrymen and point it out to the Shogun's officials. "It was true that the English nation harbored aggressive intentions towards the Eastern countries. The Spanish had the Philippines, the Portuguese – Macau, the Dutch – Formosa, the English had a stronghold in Malaysia. The English merchant Cox describes in one of his letters how in 1616 he obtained a "confirmation from the Spaniards" in Edo, which indicated that they were counting on the rebellion of some Christian daimyos whose views would be supported by all the "papist" Japanese and thus gain some foothold and which they could defend until reinforcements arrived from the sea. He pointed out that the Spaniards had ships suitable for this, loaded with soldiers and treasures, so that they did not lack money or men to implement such a strategy".[9]

Thus, when Japan in the 16th century came into contact with a new form of civilization – when they were visited by the so-called 'Southern Barbarians' as they called the Spanish and Portuguese, with their attractive novelties in the arts of war and peacetime, their attention was directed in addition to the use firearms, to the art of building castles, the production of gunpowder, cotton, tobacco, etc., to the significant art of healing, and the early Christian fathers opened a new world of medicine to them (an area that was unknown to Chinese medicine). Missionaries and converts, with the support of feudal lords, founded hospitals, built Christian churches, and established a pro-Gallic medical school.

Nevertheless, according to George Sansom, "on the whole it cannot be said that the intellectual influence of Europe on Japan in the 16th and early 17th centuries was neither deep nor lasting. If we judge from further [Japanese] history, the most lasting impression was left by the natural sciences – astronomy, cartography, shipbuilding, mining and metallurgy; and it seems as if until recently the East always welcomed our mechanical devices and was cold towards our philosophy".[10]

"JESUIT PERIL"

The second half of the 16th century is, according to Lafcadio Hearn, the most interesting period of Japanese history for three reasons. First, three powerful captains appear: Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Ieyasu. Secondly, this period is significant because in it the old social system was fully integrated – the definitive unification of the clan lords under the

[9] *Ibid*, 376.
[10] *Ibid*, 364.

central military government was carried out. And finally, the period is particularly interesting because of the attempt to baptize Japan for the first time – it is the story of the rise and fall of Jesuit power.[11]

According to many, the introduction of Christianity by the Portuguese Jesuits was the greatest danger ever to threaten Japan's national integrity, except perhaps the division of the imperial house within itself in the 14th century. Xavier comes during a period of great unrest that preceded Nobunaga's attempt to centralize power. He landed in Kagoshima in 1549 and by 1581 the Jesuits had built 200 churches throughout the country. This speaks volumes about the speed with which the new faith spread. The Japanese religious government was received in Rome in 1585 and since then no less than 11 daimyos ('kings' as the Jesuits rightly called them) were baptized. The new faith became popular.

When Oda Nobunaga came to power he was sympathetic to the Jesuits for several reasons, not so much out of sympathy for the religion (he himself never converted to Christianity) but because he thought their influence would help him in the fight against Buddhism. But, "the aid and protection which, for purely political reasons, he afforded to the foreign priests allowed them to develop their power to a degree which Nobunaga soon gave reason to regret".[12]

The period of tolerance towards Christians was probably prolonged by Nobunaga's assassination in 1586. He was succeeded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi who was then busy with the big problem of centralizing military power to bring peace to the country even though he judged the influence of foreign priests as dangerous. However, the Jesuit order is one of the most aggressive, and this is evidenced by their support and praise of baptized daimyos, one of whom burned a thousand Buddhist temples, destroyed numerous works of art and slaughtered Buddhist priests, and Jesuit writers praised this as a crusade and evidence of holy zeal. As some missionaries became coercive over time, a violent backlash against the Christian faith followed a year after Nobunaga's death. Namely, in 1587, Hideyoshi destroyed the missionary churches in Kyoto, Osaka and Sakai, called the Jesuits from the capital, and the following year ordered them to gather in the port of Hirado and leave the country. They disobeyed him and scattered across the country, placing themselves under the protection of various baptized daimyos. Since the priests were quiet

[11] Lafkadio Hern (2013), *Japan – pokušaj tumačenja I i II*, Kokoro, Beograd, 75.
[12] *Ibid*, 76.

then and did not teach publicly, Hideyoshi left them alone. However, that 'peace' was disturbed by the arrival of the Spanish Franciscans.

These Franciscans arrived with an embassy from the Philippines and received permission to remain in the country on condition that they did not preach Christianity. Having broken the vow, they incurred the wrath of Hideyoshi, who ordered that in 1597 six Franciscans, three Jesuits and several Japanese Christians be taken to Nagasaki and crucified. However, Hideyoshi's sudden death in 1598 allowed the Jesuits to hope for better days. His successor Tokugawa Ieyasu was busy preparing for the Battle of Sekigahara where the ruler and future fate of Japan were to be decided. He allowed them to resettle in Kyoto, Osaka and other cities. However, when he consolidated his power in 1606, he issued an edict forbidding further missionary work and ordering the baptized Japanese to renounce their foreign faith. Despite everything, the preaching continued. Although some believe that there were "almost two million Christians" in Japan at that time,[13] Ieyasu did not take harsh and repressive measures until 1614, when it can be said that the great persecution of Christians began. "From the year 1614, when in only eight (out of 64) provinces in Japan, Christianity was not introduced, the ban on foreign religion became official, and the persecution of Christians was carried out systematically and continuously until every external trace of their faith disappeared".[14]

REASONS FOR IEYASU'S DECISION

Tokugawa Ieyasu was one of the shrewdest, most promoted, and considered by some to be the most humane Japanese statesmen up to that time, so it is necessary to consider from the Japanese point of view the nature of the evidence on the basis of which he was driven to act. He was certainly well informed about the Jesuit intrigues in Japan, and several of them were directed against him.[15] Religious intrigues were common among Buddhists and did not attract the attention of the military government unless they interfered with state politics or public order. However, the religious intrigues of the Jesuits aimed at overthrowing the government. Ieyasu judged that they had a political goal of the most ambitious kind, but he was more patient than Nobunaga. By 1603,

[13] *Ibid*, 78.
[14] *Ibid*.
[15] *Ibid*, 80.

he had put all areas of Japan under his yoke, but he did not publish his final decree on the expulsion of Christians for another 11 years. In that decree, the Christian fathers were blamed for two things: for a political conspiracy to overthrow the government, under the guise of religion; and for intolerance of Shinto and Buddhist forms of native religion. Until then, Ieyasu must have heard a lot of bad things about Roman Catholicism: about the Spanish conquest of America and the extermination of the Indian people; about the persecution in the Netherlands and the work of the Inquisition in other countries; about Philip II's attempt to conquer England and the loss of two large armadas. Ieyasu had another important source of information. It was the already mentioned English sailor Will Adams who arrived in Japan on a Dutch ship. As the ship was immediately captured upon entering the island of Kyushu, Adams and his companions were taken into custody by the feudal lord of Bungo Province, who informed Ieyasu. The Portuguese Jesuits were afraid of these Protestant sailors and were afraid of their conversation with the Shogun. They persistently tried to have the sailors executed. But the more they insisted on it, the more Ieyasu favored Adams, saying that these new prisoners had done nothing to him so far and that it would be unwise to execute them. Ieyasu asked Adams about his travels and the state of his country. He was satisfied with the answers; Adams received property and numerous servants, but was never allowed to return to his native England.

As for what was going on in Japan, Ieyasu had the most perfect espionage system and knew everything that was going on in the country. When he first took harsh measures against the Christians, they were not directed against the Jesuits, but against 'a more unreasonable order'. Thus, in 1612, the Franciscan sects were disbanded, and the Jesuits were privileged and remained in Nagasaki, where they were the only ones allowed to have their own school. Roman Catholicism was in good graces for another two years after the episode with the Franciscans.

According to Lafcadio Hearn, Christianity was fundamentally opposed to all the beliefs and traditions on which Japanese society was based. "The Japanese state was an alliance of religious communities, with a god-king at its head – the customs of all these communities were supposed to reinforce the religious laws, and ethics were identified with observance of customs; Ancestral piety was the basis of social order, and loyalty itself came from ancestral piety. But this Western religion which taught that a husband should leave his parents and be faithful to

his wife, made the loyalty of offspring a lower virtue. It proclaimed that duty to one's parents, master and ruler remain duties only when that obedience does not contradict Roman teaching and that the highest duty is not obedience to the heavenly ruler in Kyoto, but to the Pope in Rome. Didn't these missionaries from Portugal and Spain call gods and Buddhas devils? Surely such a doctrine was subversive, no matter how cunningly its defenders could interpret it. In addition, the value of faith as a social force can be judged by its fruits. In Europe, this faith was a constant source of unrest, wars, persecutions, and ferocious cruelties. This faith started great unrest in Japan, fueled political intrigues, and forged many evils. In the course of future political troubles, it would justify the disobedience of children to their parents, wives to their husbands, subjects to their masters, masters to the Shogun. Now the most important duty of the government was to impose social order, and to maintain the conditions of peace and stability without which the people could never recover from the exhaustion after the thousand-year war".[16]

This must have been the thinking of the ruler of Japan at the time, who in 1611 received information that Christians were plotting on the island of Sado, whose governor Okubo was baptized and was supposed to become the ruler of the country if the conspiracy succeeded. Still, Ieyasu waited. By 1614, there were no more baptized daimyo who could carry out the plans of the Jesuits because most of them were either dead, or their possessions were confiscated, or they were exiled. Foreign priests and catechists were not immediately treated harshly. Approximately 300 of them were put on ships and sent out of the country along with the Japanese who were suspected of religious-political intrigues. However, there are stricter measures undertaken after the event that took place in 1615. That year, Tokugawa Ieyasu officially took the place of Hideyoshi's son - Hideyori, whom he took care of, but whom he did not want to trust to rule the country since he was only 23 years old at the time. In addition to a significant income, Ieyasu also left him one of the strongest fortresses in Japan – the mighty Osaka Castle. Hideyori loved the Jesuits and Osaka Castle became their refuge. Ieyasu decides to attack that, until then, almost impregnable fortress after he heard that a conspiracy was being hatched there. The castle was conquered and burned. 100,000 lives were lost in the siege and fire. Ieyasu died the following year (1616), and was succeeded by his son Hidetada, who fought even more valiantly than his father against the Jesuits – he banned all their

[16] *Ibid*, 85.

Orders, under the threat of death, none of the subjects were allowed to be Christians, and in order to prevent the spread of the faith, he banned foreign merchants to reside in any large city. Since many expelled priests preached the faith in secret, Hidetada issued a decree in 1617 condemning to death any Roman Catholic priest found in Japan.

The persecution was, of course, terrible. It eventually led to, or helped to bring about, a Christian rebellion on the feudal estate of Arima – known in history as the Shimabara Rebellion[17]. In 1636, a multitude of peasants, driven to despair by the tyranny of their masters (areas of converts – Arima and Karatsu), took up arms, burned all the Japanese temples in the area and declared a religious war. Their banner had a cross, and they were led by baptized samurai. They were soon joined by Christian refugees from all over the country, and their number grew to almost 40,000. They established themselves in a castle on the coast of the Shimabara peninsula, in the town of Hara. The local authorities were helpless, and the rebels were defeated only after the government sent 160,000 troops. After a brave defense that lasted 102 days, the castle was captured in 1638 and its defenders were all killed. Japanese historians claim that the rebellion was designed and started by Christians who wanted to conquer Nagasaki, subjugate Kyushu, call for foreign aid and force a change of government, and if foreign aid could indeed have been sent, the result could have been a prolonged civil war. According to Lafcadio Hearn, "the massacre represented the application of Japanese law: the penalty for peasants rebelling against their master, under any circumstances, is death. As for the politics of such slaughter, it should be remembered that Nobunaga, because of a lesser provocation, destroyed the Tendai Buddhists on Mount Hiei. We have every reason to pity the brave men who lost their lives at Shimabara, and to sympathize with their revolt against the horrible cruelties of their masters. But it is necessary, in the light of justice, to look at the whole event from the point of view of Japanese politicians".[18]

With the massacre at Shimabara, the history of the Portuguese and Spanish missions ends. After that event, Christianity was slowly, firmly and inexorably suppressed from visible existence. It was tolerated, or

[17] It is sometimes difficult to separate the spiritual from the economic factor in certain religious movements in Japan. It is therefore difficult to say to what extent the fanatical (Ikko) rebellions of the 15th century can be classed as a peasant revolt, and this is also true of the so-called Christian rebellion of Shimabara, which broke out in 1637 and was among the immediate causes of Japan breaking off relations with the outside world.

[18] Lafkadio Hern (2013), *op. cit*., 89.

partially tolerated, for only 65 years, and the entire history of its propagation and destruction occupies a period of barely 90 years. Seen from a political rather than a religious angle, and judging by the outcomes, many are of the opinion that the Jesuit effort to baptize Japan is "a crime against humanity, a devastation, a calamity comparable to an earthquake, tsunami or volcanic eruption".[19] The rebellion was followed by the policy of isolation – closing Japan to the world, adopted by Hidetada, and maintained by his successors. Not only were all foreigners, except Dutch merchants, expelled from the country, but all foreigners from the West were openly distrusted. The Dutch traders had their factory on the small island of Deshima where they were strictly supervised. The question remains for another paper: how could a foreign religion penetrate so quickly into a society based on ancestor worship and which apparently has a tremendous ability to resist external influences? Certainly, the missions could have been more successful if there had not been unnecessary attacks on the ancestor cult (which was alive in Japan in the 16th and 17th centuries), which are actually attacks on social order, and Japanese society instinctively opposed such attacks on its ethical basis. Unlike the finer and incomparably more humane faith of India, which had learned the secret of successful missionary work a thousand years before Loyola, the religion of the Jesuits could never adapt to the social conditions of Japan, a fact which predetermined the fate of the missions in Japan. Because all the repressive and cruel measures that the Japanese ruler took against the foreign religion was because he believed that the victory of the foreign religion would bring about the complete disintegration of society and the submission of the empire to foreign domination. Isolation for more than 250 years brought to Japan the long-desired peace, but also from the point of view of culture, an incredible development, especially plebeian art, which preserved its authenticity.

And Yoshisaburo Okakura believes that the early Westerners who visited Japan in the 16th century were a little wiser and less intolerant in their behavior towards the Japanese, they would have done their work better and spared the Japanese people the terrible disadvantage of being closed to the world. "The fact remains that, owing largely to their fatal lack of compassion and their inability to make use of traditional beliefs, they have failed to do much good, despite their efforts to do so, for, as is the case with the furthest idleness in one's home, so with the ***sanctum sanctorum*** of the nation's heart – cannot be reached unless

[19] *Ibid*, 90.

one passes through the passage leading to it. Any attempt to break into it will surely bring down the house itself".[20]

SILENCE

Our place in eternity depends on how much we loved,
on the quality and strength of our goodness.

St. Nectarius of Aegina

Martin Scorsese's film Silence shows the journey and search of two Jesuit priests for their teacher Ferreira, who, according to rumors, renounced his faith and remained living in Japan. Not believing the rumours, the two young men decide on a difficult and dangerous journey to Japan, being aware that the persecution of Christians had already been carried out in Japan for a long time and that all foreigners, especially missionaries, were strictly prohibited from entering the country. However, the film (like the book) shows a much more important and perhaps more difficult journey –the inner, personal journey of priest Rodriguez (and perhaps every believer) who finds his faith shaken after many trials, doubts and suffering (especially seeing the suffering of others – those of Japanese converts who were tortured and killed even though they had previously renounced the faith, but were not pardoned because Rodríguez himself refused to formally renounce the faith by trampling the fumie / crucifixion).

The main character, besides the priest Rodriguez, is certainly the anti-hero Kichijiro – a coward, a weakling, someone who publicly renounced Christ several times, and in whose hands they were supposed to place their fate at the beginning of their journey – he was supposed to be their guide. Already at the beginning of the journey, Father Rodríguez shows a kind of disgust towards Kichijiro, marveling at his cowardice and fear of death, in contrast to the then image of the Japanese as brave and courageous heroes, who fearlessly face death.

From the very beginning, Father Rodríguez feels first contempt for this poor fellow, and then fear – fear that he will betray them when they come to Japan. His apprehension comes true – indeed Kichijiro betrays him – he sells him out for 300 gold coins, but tormented by a guilty conscience, he constantly follows him and begs for forgiveness. In the film, Japan is shown as an extremely inhospitable place, a country

[20] Okakura, Jošisaburo (2014), *Život i misao Japana*, Kokoro, Beograd, 117.

where the peasants live terribly under the yoke, burdened by excessive taxes. Also, government officials are cruel and ferocious. Seeing the suffering of those people, Father Rodríguez asks several times during the film why God remains silent – both to the suffering and the martyrdom of the converts. He feels an obligation to stay alive to keep the flame of Christianity burning in the "Japanese swamp" where nothing succeeds. In fact, an internal, personal drama unfolds – many questions arise, he even questions his own courage. The responsibility for all Japanese Christians is transferred to him. He meets with a samurai who explains to him the reasons why Christians were expelled and their religion banned and he was given an ultimatum – to renounce his religion and the peasants will be spared. Rodríguez is still followed by Kichijiro who admits his weakness – he is actually the embodiment of guilty conscience. He asks the priest for confession. Father Rodríguez cannot reject him, but now he already feels repulsion and disgust towards the ugly and smelly Kichijiro.

He meets again with the lord of the province, Inoue – he compares that meeting to that of Pilatus and Christ. He listens to the story of a man who had four concubines who quarreled because of jealousy, so he threw them all out of the house. The man is Japan, and the concubines are Spain, Portugal, Holland and England. He has openly said that the authorities consider missionary work to be an imposition of love. By then, Father Rodríguez has lost his courage (he thinks this is because of the comfort he was in before that conversation) and he realizes that it is the temptation and suffering that harden us, that give us the opportunity to be better and persist in defending our beliefs and ideals. He was then taken to meet his former teacher, Ferreira, who had renounced Christianity twenty years earlier and had since translated books on astronomy and medicine – becoming a useful member of the Japanese society. He convinces him to renounce his faith as he realized that the Japanese actually believed in their own version of the Christian God; he reproaches him for doing nothing for the suffering Christians. Father Rodríguez breaks down and steps on fumie (icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary).

Since then, he lived in a house in Nagasaki, was given a Japanese name, and assigned the wife and children of a deceased person. He lost all the rights of a priest; had a job in the magistrate's office – he evaluated things that arrived from abroad. Kichijiro comes to him again and asks for forgiveness and confession. At that moment, Rodríguez hears a voice saying that God was not silent but suffered with him. He then

for the first time understands and accepts the man in front of him, and confesses him sincerely. Everything that happened to him up to that moment was necessary in order to reach that love. In the end, he realizes that the Lord was not silent, and even if he had been, his life would have spoken about Him until that day.

Therefore, the film can be understood in two ways – on the one hand, as a political propaganda of the Roman Catholic faith and a condemnation of a country that did not listen to their view of the truth. Certainly, the moment in which the plot is set is isolated from the wider political and social context, and the film is somewhat inclined to emphasize the crazy fanaticism of the natives (although it is not that such fanaticism was not previously present in some members of the missionary order). Choosing a side in that story is a lost battle in advance because we need to be affected by everyone's suffering.

However, that personal level, finding your own faith, is much more important, the free choice of which path we will take in time and circumstances that we may not be able to influence ourselves and avoid or change. In the film, it was shown how the priest Rodriguez was buried in Japan according to Buddhist custom – he was cremated, but his wife secretly put a cross in his hand (which deviates from the book), alluding to the fact that he remained a Christian at heart until his death. And it is the heart that leads the conversation with God, even if it seems that He is silent on the outside.

CONCLUSION

We cannot even imagine the way in which the history of Japan would have developed if the Christian missions in that country had continued to be successful as at the beginning. Their complete success would probably wipe out the wonderful world of Japanese traditions, beliefs and customs, because everywhere the development of art is to some extent connected with religion, and as much as art reflects the beliefs of the people, so much is it hateful to the enemies of those beliefs. In particular, Japanese art of Buddhist origin is an art of religious suggestion – not only in terms of painting and sculpture, but also in decoration.

Driven above all by the fear of losing power and sovereignty, by closing Japan to the rest of the world, the Japanese rulers certainly decided to deny their country all the gifts that the West could offer them. However, Japan managed surprisingly well in this new situation – it

turned to itself and devoted itself to perfecting and improving its own culture. And that culture is certainly exceptional and unique and enabled it to enter the period of industrialization on an equal footing with European countries and be the 'economic miracle' of the East more than 2.5 centuries later, when it reopened to the world. Although the charming art world of ancient Japan was inevitably destroyed by Western industrialism, this industrial influence was not so fanatical, and the destruction was not carried out at such a galloping speed, "so that the fading beauty was allowed to be written down for the future benefit of human civilization".[21]

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[21] Lafkadio Hern (2013), *op. cit*., 99.