

## ‘Silence’ is an Overwrought View of Religious Faith

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 11, 2017 - 11:21am

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – For gosh sakes, someone call the Vatican and make Marty Scorsese an honorary priest. He is overtly fascinated – in this work and his other films – with the notion of religious faith, particular within his Catholic roots. He approaches the subject again in the intense “Silence.”

Based on a novel from the 1960s, “Silence” is a story about Portuguese priests in an missionary zone, in this case Japan in the late 1600s. It is filled with the “testing” of these priests’ faith, as the Japanese were ruthless in their prosecution of these pastors. Basically this is Scorsese obsessing about the tests of faith that were outlined in the novel, and visually bringing the torture of this moral dilemma to life. The film actually gets better after a slow start – and has an electric atmosphere of dread and honor – but really does nothing to resolve the matter of man versus the breaking point. However, it is a worthy addition to the Scorsese religious canon, which includes “Last Temptation of Christ” and “Kundun,” even if...in its redundancy...this expression of faith’s challenges is not breaking any new ground.

In late 1600s Portugal, a missionary Jesuit priest named Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson) has sent a worrisome last letter from Japan, and there are rumors that he has committed “apostasy” (a disaffiliation from his religion). This troubles two of Ferriera’s students, Father Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Father Garupe (Adam Driver). They decide to travel to Japan to find the errant priest.



Priests Garupe (Adam Driver) and Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) in ‘Silence’

*Photo credit: Paramount Pictures*

Upon their arrival, the priests find underground Christians through the help of their contact Kichijiro (Yosuke Kobozyuka). With the Japanese alerted to their presence, the two priests split up to resume their search for Ferreira. Rodrigues is the first to be captured, is tortured in various ways and is asked to grind his heel into the image of Christ as a repudiation of his faith. He will eventually encounter both Father Garupe and Ferreira again, in the midst of overwhelming torment, ordered by an old Samurai (Issey Ogata).

This is an odd adaptation to tackle in this day and age, it is my opinion that most people would repudiate their faith if you threatened to take away their mobile phone. But it's an interesting examination of a different epoch, one without a large number of secular distractions, where a person could freely and intently think about his connection with a deity. It becomes extremely powerful in this statement, but its exposition is repeated over and over.

This is also a difficult movie to create a performance that isn't overdone. Adam Driver, in particular, seems to push emotion out of every pore, but in the end it felt like too much. Andrew Garfield fares a bit better, he has a sense of control as an actor that emphasizes the understanding to his actions within the story. Among the Japanese actors, Issey Ogata as the Old Samurai is creepy and necessary in a duplicitous character, and relishes the opportunity.





Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson) in ‘Silence’

Photo credit: Paramount Pictures

Also there is a question as to what Martin Scorsese is trying to communicate in the adaptation (he wrote the screenplay with Jay Cocks). Obviously as an individual he has struggled with his own faith, but by adapting a story set in a faith testing environment of the Old World, what is he saying about us now? It wasn't clear to me, and just became a series of tests with no conclusive results – although people of faith might think differently.

In essence, Christians have projected as much torture in the name of their faith as has been brought upon them, if history is a guide. The pursuit of religious power has become as over-incentivized today as it was in a less enlightened time – even more so in our era of mass communication. The need for some people to set their moral compass with an invisible deity continues to supersede the need to reach out to the here-and-now of their fellow human beings.

*“Silence” opened in Chicago on January 6th, and will have a wider nationwide release on January 13th. Featuring Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver, Clarán Hinds, Issey Ogata, Tadanobu Asano, Yosuke Kobozuka and Liam Neeson. Screenplay adapted by Martin Scorsese and Jay Cocks, from the novel by Shusaka Endo. Directed by Martin Scorsese. Rated “R”*



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