Problem of Evil and Pain in the Novels of Shusaku Endo

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<Introduction>

One of the greatest and most embarrassing problems for the Christian thinkers is the problem of evil. And accordingly, it is one of the greatest and most frequently encountered themes in Christian literature. Existence of evil in the world which has been created by the almighty and all good God seems perplexing.

The problem of evil in its theological and logical form can be summarized as: “If God were good, He would wish to make the world without evil, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But then, why is there evil in the world?” 1) In the western tradition, there have been mainly two types of attempt to answer this question, which form Augustinian theodicy and Irenaean type of theodicy. St. Augustine mainly attributes the origin of evil in this world to the first human being’s disobedience to God through his misuse of free will which God gave him in order that he might obey God freely. This is man’s original sin and fall, from which all evils have come about. 2)

Once God gave man free will, even omnipotent God couldn’t prevent man from falling, because giving freedom and not allowing to use that freedom in one way or other is logical contradiction and mere impossibility. (God’s omnipotence is ability to do anything logically possible, and it is impossible even for God to do logical impossibility—for instance, to make a round square). St. Irenaeus, on the other hand, holds man was originally made immature and imperfect, and intended to grow to be perfect through
experiences of both good and evil. In this view, evil is necessary for the perfection of humankind.

As it is apparent from the two types of representative theodicies, the western theological circle when discussing the problem of evil tends to focus on the origin and reason of existence of evil. However, the living faith is more concerned with how to deal with the evils and pains we experience in our daily life, and often, the real problem of evil for both lay believers and practicing pastors is this encountering evil, rather than metaphysical origin of evil. And, ever since olden times, a lot of literature has been wrestling with the problem of evil and suffering in varieties of living way, sometimes to pose the problem, sometimes to help people, sometimes to encourage them, and sometimes to comfort those who are in pain.

Shusaku Endo, perhaps the best-known Japanese Catholic novelist in the twentieth century, is also one of the novelists who are deeply aware of the problem of pain in relation to Christian faith. But unlike the traditional theologians concerned in theodicy, his problem seems not so much why evil exists in this world as what God does in face of suffering of His people, and how people behave in this evil-contaminated world. Endo does not show any interest in St. Augustine’s free will doctrine, or original fall of man, nor does he approve suffering from the viewpoint of education and perfection, as would be in line with the Irenaean doctrine.

The problem of evil that shows up in Endo’s novels concerns largely two aspects: that is, 1) what God and Jesus do when people suffer, particularly when they suffer for their faith, or when good people suffer; and 2) Japanese people’s incapacity of feeling guiltiness in front of God.

In this paper we shall 1) see from his published writings that Endo’s question and answer to the problem of evil come from the deep rooted Japanese image of god of mercy, to which Japanese ethical soil is also deeply connected, and 2) discuss his awareness of Japanese people’s lack of sense of guilt and how it concerns with his answer
to the problem of evil, so as to see validity and significance of Endo’s answer to the problem of theodicy today.

<Endo’s maternal God>

In the preface to the American edition of A Life of Jesus, he admits, “My book called A life of Jesus may cause surprise for American readers when they discover an interpretation of Jesus somewhat at odds with the image they now possess.” In Endo’s novels, either in A Life of Jesus, the Silence, the Woman I Left Behind, The Wonderful Fool, or Songs of Sorrows, main characters are Christ figures, and they are depicted as all-forgiving, all-embracing and tender. As Richard A. Schucher, the translator of A Life of Jesus, suggests, those are “in that image of Jesus dear to the heart of Endo himself: innocent persons, vulnerable and ineffectual, who suffer at the hands of those whom they love, and eventually exert a mysterious spiritual influence.”

Endo’s Jesus is, as Endo himself says, “an eternal companion” and co-sufferer. He writes in A Life of Jesus, “Yet the greatest misfortune that Jesus found in the stricken people was their having no one to love them.[…] Jesus knew the need of human beings for unfailing, enduring companionship. They needed a companion, the kind of a mother who would share their grief and pain and weep together with them. He believed that God by his nature was not in the image of a stern father, but was more like a mother […]”

Indeed, it is well-known that, God in Endo’s novels is a maternal god, rather than God the Father, the first person of the Holy Trinity. This maternal image of god does not come from any ignorance on the part of Endo of the orthodox creed. He has been a Catholic since he was a child and learned in Christianity much more deeply than ordinary Japanese. As a student, he majored in French literature, and studied more than two and a half years in France, concentrating on such contemporary French Catholic novelists as
François Mauriac. Yet, while he intellectually knows the doctrine of God the Father, emotionally, as a Japanese author, he cannot but conceive Jesus in a maternal image and present his image of God accordingly. This has caused him a great tension throughout his career, while, fortunately for his reader, giving his work depth and originality. We shall see this mother-God image also influence his view on the problem of evil.

Endo finds that the God of wrath and Justice that is presented by John the Baptist would be incongruous to the Japanese mind and sensibility, and at least, Endo’s God is not like that. Accordingly, to say in relation to the problem of evil, his God tends not to be an awful punishing God: as Endo says in *A Life of Jesus*:

The image of God that John embraced was a father-image—the image of wrath, and judgment, and punishment. It was the image of a stern, exacting God who reveals himself in the various circumstances in the Old Testament—a deity destroying whole cities for not obeying him, raging at the unrighteous people, and mercilessly punishing betrayals of human beings.[…]

Among the disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus must have wondered if such a God of wrath as John preached was the true image of God.[…] Rather, Jesus felt something other is welling up in him, which is to take shape as an image of God that more closely resembles a gentle merciful mother, the image of God that he would preach to the people on a mountain by the Lake of Galilee at a later time. 

* * *

Perhaps the most striking example of his God as an all-forgiving co-sufferer is found in *Silence*, a historical story of Christian martyrs and apostates during the ferocious persecution in the seventeenth century Japan. There, a missionary, Rodrigues, is caught by the government authority and commanded to tread on a tablet bearing an image of
Christ. This treading is to be taken as a sign of abjuration and meant to show that he has abandoned the missionary work. He refuses to do so and endures severe torture without flinching a little from his own physical pain. Yet in the end, he cannot but choose to take the step, as he is told that the persecutors are now torturing not only him but also the Japanese believers, who have confessed their faith and come to him, and as long as he keeps on resisting, the torture should continue. Those pious believers would be killed after being tormented harshly. When he is about to step on the face of Christ, he hears His voice:

> Go ahead and tread on me. I know better than anyone else how much pain you feel in your foot. Tread on me. It was to be treaded on by you that I was born, and it was to share your pain that I was crucified.\(^8\)

In the persecution, a lot of believers choose to die martyrs rather than abjure, for they believe they would go to heaven if they die in faith. The problem of evil in this novel is God’s silence in face of His people’s suffering. A peasant Christian, named Kichihiro, is frightened by torture and abjures almost readily, and even sells the priest to the authority. Kichihiro is, then, a Judas figure. When the priest has been arrested, Kichihiro comes back to him and asks confession and forgiveness, saying, “Let me have my say. Those who have trodden the holy image have also an excuse for it.[…] My foot, which trod on it, ached. Ached with severe pain. God made us weak and yet demands us to behave like the strong. It is unreasonable.[…] Father, what should we do? Such cowardly weaklings as we? I didn’t betray you for money. Yet as the officials threatened me so terribly …”\(^9\)

In Kichihiro’s abjuration, who seems to be ultimately responsible is God. In this novel, Endo’s sympathy is with those weak who collapsed from fear of death or unable to endure the physical pain. In the light of orthodox Christianity that regards abjuration as a fatal
sin, Endo’s God seems heretical. Yet in *Silence* it is even suggested, by a former Jesuit, Ferreira, who has already recanted his faith, that the act of apostasy is here, for Rodrigues, a supreme act of love, that is “the most painful act of love that nobody has ever done”:

for, by stepping on the image of Christ, he would save the lives of now suffering Christian peasants, while incurring damnation and eternal death on himself. Here, the principle that there is no greater love than to sacrifice one’s own life for others is imposed on the priest Rodrigues, and he follows it. Yet, in following it, he immediately hears the Lord’s voice and knows he would not be damned after all. Ferreira tells Rodrigues, “Christ would certainly have apostatised to help men.[...] For love Christ would have apostatised. Even if it meant giving up everything he had.”

This peculiarity of God in *Silence* shows off when we compare this novel with Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*. There, a priest who has also abjured in the persecution keeps on suffering from consciousness that he has committed the sacrilege, feeling he would not be able to escape damnation:

He stood outside himself and wondered whether he was even fit for hell. He was just a fat old impotent man mocked and taunted between the sheets. But then he remembered the gift he had been given which nobody could take away. That was what made him worthy of damnation—the power he still had of turning the water into the flesh and blood of God. He was a sacrilege. Wherever he went, whatever he did, he defiled God. Some mad renegade Catholic, puffed up with the Governor’s politics, had once broken into a church (in the days when there were still churches) and seized the Host.

In *The Power and the Glory*, though it can be admitted that the author is sympathetic to the renegade, the renegade himself takes it for granted that he should be damned; and it is also an open question to the reader if he is finally saved or not. Yet the conspicuous
thing in *Silence* is that the apostates themselves question God not only about their sufferings but also about their weakness that cannot stand the torture, and get answered. Even more conspicuous is the answer they get that God suffers with them to share their pain. God in *Silence* is the redeemer of people’s pain, rather than of their sin. People will be forgiven even just for the fact they feel pain in their weakness. In that, Endo goes so much as to imply that the historical Judas, who sold Christ and hanged himself, would have been saved. After everything, Rodrigues calls to God: “Lord, I resented your silence,” and what he hears in his mind is the Lord’s answer: ‘I was not silent. I suffered beside you.’

‘But you told Judas to go away: What thou dost do quickly. What happened to Judas?’

‘I did not say that. Just as I told you to step on the plaque, so I told Judas to do what he was going to do. For Judas was in anguish as you are now.’

In contrast to the priest in Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*, Rodrigues eventually gets reassured that his incantation will be approved by God. Then, following Jesus’ way toward Judas, as he now understands in his anguish, he forgives Kichijiro and hears his confession. After the confession, however, when Rodrigues says the benefactory prayers “Go in peace!” Kichijiro does not seem to understand the priest well, for it is written, “Kichijiro in anger wept with his voice stifled, yet presently went away.”

And yet, it is implied that Kichijiro in this novel will be saved, for (according to the Catholic belief) the priest has not lost the sacramental power even after the apostasy and he has knowingly used the power for Kichijiro. Then, Rodrigues, too, will be saved after all, and that not only in spite of betrayal and apostasy, but rather, for the pains he suffered in his apostasy, which brought him to a new love for God. He says,
I have administered that sacrament that only priests can administer. My fellow priests would condemn my act as sacrilege; but even if I betrayed them, I have not betrayed my Lord. I love him now in a different way from before. Everything that has taken place until now has been necessary to bring me to this love. Even now I am the last priest in this land. But Our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day was testifying him.\(^{14}\)

As to the problem of salvation, it is noteworthy that Endo is commenting as follows on Greene’s The Heart of the Matter, where the protagonist, Scobie, who has committed adultery and sacrilegious sins of getting communion without having confessed his affair, finally kills himself because he cannot desert either his wife or the child widow for fear he should hurt either.

Yet although a theologian may criticize Scobie—an author cannot condemn him so easily.[…] While moving his pen, perhaps Greene wished Scobie’s salvation. We can never say a Catholic author may falsify the fact in favour of the doctrine. Yet as a Catholic, he must have been praying secretly in his heart that his character, who is smudged with his sin, should be saved in the eternal world. Hence, the famous question, “Has Scobie ever got eternal punishment?”[…]

Yet, why shouldn’t we think that God has wiped Scobie’s tears in heaven and laid His hand on his exhausted face?\(^{10}\)

Such is natural feeling of Endo, and he makes the salvation true in his own version of sacrilegious sin that is committed from love and pity.
<Japanese Concept of God>

This almost heretically all-forgiving image of God comes from the fact that Endo did not write as a theologian, but a Japanese novelist. Speaking of his Life of Jesus, Endo says he "has assigned himself to embody such an image of Jesus as is understandable to Japanese people."

Therefore, in the life of Jesus depicted in this book—though I know a lot of clergymen and theologians will be dissatisfied—there is no image of Jesus acting as the one who fulfils the Jewish Old Testament. Secondly, as I wrote this book as a novelist, I did not try to make theological exegesis as to his messages. It is beyond the design of this book and also beyond my power.\(^{16}\)

He also writes,

I do not think at all that in my life of Jesus, I managed to encompass the true figure of Jesus himself in his totality. We can think of him only through our own limited experiences[...]. It is impossible for a novelist to express the holy. I only touched the surface of Jesus' human life. Yet if the figure of Jesus that I, as a Japanese, present here is understood and felt as real, my work will not have been a waste of time.\(^{17}\)

It is significant that his figure of Jesus is that he "as a Japanese" experienced. He was baptized when he was eleven years old, because his mother was a devoted Catholic and wished him to be a Christian, too. Yet, as a Japanese, he could not help feeling Christianity something remote and alien, which he compares to "foreign clothes" that would not fit him well. However, he has never deserted his faith just because of that
remoteness. He remembers afterwards:

Yet, even at that time after all, I could not throw off those foreign clothes. I dared not throw off the garment that the dear one gave me before I could be sure and confident. Then, somehow, that supported me through my boyhood and youth.

Later, I decided to keep wearing it after all. I thought I would rather reform those western clothes to a Japanese wear to fit me. For, I realized that man cannot live on many things but has to live out one thing for the whole life.\(^{18}\)

Endo is conscious that such “reform” of Christianity is what Japanese people have long been doing. In Silence, Ferreira has given up his missionary work through the sense of complete failure to transmit the true Christianity. For, he noticed that the Japanese would never understand God the Father but substitute the concept of Christian God by their traditional concept of the Buddhist saviour. From the western point of view that sees this as totally negative tendency, he says to Rodrigues,

St. Xavier taught them Deus. Yet they changed even the word “Deus” and changed it into some deity that they call “Dainichi.”(the Great Sun).\(^{19}\) From the beginning, when those Japanese confused Deus and Dainichi, they began to transform our God in their way and build something different.\(^{19}\) In their mind, before we were aware of it, the Christian God lost His substance as God.\(^{19}\) Japanese people do not have any concept of God nor would be able to have one.\(^{19}\) They are incapable to think of God who totally transcends the human. What they call God is some exalted, beautified image of man. It is something that has essentially the same kind of existence as man. Yet it is not the Church’s God.\(^{19}\)

It is obvious that Endo’s image of maternal God is largely due to the traditional
Japanese concept of supreme deity. Although most Japanese do not have any clear theistic notion, a lot of Japanese people vaguely conceive deity in the image of a merciful and benevolent mother. In the oldest creation myth extant in Japanese language, *Kojiki*, the highest god is the Sun-goddess Amaterasu-Oomicami (who is sometimes seen as the bride or a temple girl of the Sun God, herself being a human). Japanese traditional religion is essentially animistic and the gods and goddesses are believed to reside in myriads of things in heaven and earth, and there, the milder nature of the supreme goddess accords with the mild climate of Japanese land. Besides, in Japan, mythological gods and goddesses are ontologically and essentially the same as man. They are mortal, not omnipotent, nor omniscient, and in that respect more alike to Greek or Roman gods and goddesses, except that the supreme goddess is feminine and much tender than Zeus or Jupiter. It had been believed, or at least commonly said, even till the end of World War II, that the Japanese Emperors were direct descendants of this Sun-goddess Amaterasu-Oomicami. It was also widely believed that all human beings would become gods after death—a belief, which has still some remnant in the popular custom of worshipping the dead ancestors as the family guardian gods. A representative scholar of Japanese classic, Norinaga Motoori, in Edo period (18th century) defined “gods” as “what is awe-ful.” We see here our ancestors’ animistic belief (which perhaps is more or less latent in many of our contemporary Japanese’s mind) that sees potential gods in everything, feeling awe toward countless things in the world.

Besides, those Japanese deities are not gods of justice and punishment. The sins and climes have been regarded as something like stains, or even impurity, which can in many cases be washed away. There are religious rituals, for instance, to wash away one’s impurity and sins by water, sprinkling water over oneself or basing in a river. This is called “*misogi*” that means “wash away stains and impurity on the body.” There is an expression “to cast away (the sins) into the stream,” meaning “to let bygones bygone,” or “to forgive and forget.” Sometimes, the mere passing of times, which helps men forget
their past misbehaviour, is felt to have the effect of purification, and there seems to be a lot of people who regard their past sins merely something in the past, for which they do not have to take responsibility after so many years. Sins are not necessarily to be atoned for. Therefore, for many Japanese it is quite inconceivable that God needs his son to be killed on the cross in order to forgive man. Many people feel that if God is omnipotent, he should be able to simply and unconditionally forgive them without shedding innocent blood. To die to redeem the original sin that is committed by some obscure people in the prehistoric time would be totally inconceivable. Besides, anyway, ordinary Japanese people do not have any sense of original sin. As Ken’ichi Tanikawa, a Japanese anthropologist, remarks, Japanese creation myth begins just after the Great Flood, when water has subsided. The cause of the flood, which might well have been the original sin of the creatures, is not told. This may be one of the reasons why Japanese tradition lacks the concept of inherent sinfulness, or fallen nature, of human beings. Then, in turn, this is perhaps one reason why so many Japanese can feel they can just forget the past sins as if it is nothing to do with the essential part of their personality. Natural condition of man is innocent, and perhaps because of that, it is felt to be easy to reset all.

In Japan, the most popular Buddhist deity is the Kannon, or the Goddess of Mercy, who is believed to transform herself into thirty-two different figures in order to save all the people and lead them to the paradise. As Tetsuo Yamaori teaches us, the Kannon is a maternal goddess, and “as is the case of St. Mary in Christianity, this Goddess of Mercy has been worshipped for having both femininity and maternity united in herself.” The closeness of St. Mary and Kannon in the native Japanese mind is visible in the figures of so called “St. Mary-Kannon,” that are sculptures of St. Mary made by hidden Christians in the days of persecution. They were made in disguise of Kannon, to deceive the eyes of the persecuting officials. People worshipped and prayed to God, pretending to worship Kannon. In this, in the imagination of the worshippers, the Christian worship of
God must have necessarily been influenced by worship of Kannon goddess. 

Endo also calls our attention to the fact that most of the first generation of those hidden Christians were those who had officially abjured Christianity in the persecution. He remarks that those hidden Christians have preferred to worship St. Mary. He says it was probably because they were so keenly suffering from guilty feeling for betraying God and renouncing their faith that they wanted St. Mary’s mediation. That is, they feared God’s anger and wanted her to pacify it.

They were afraid of the “Father.” For those apostates, the Deus who knew their dark past was frightful.[...] They must have seen the image of God in the western missionaries who had stood the torment and died martyrs. They must have felt that those strong missionaries, as well as their strong fellow believers, were angrily blaming them. So that, instead of such a rigorous Father, they needed someone who would forgive them and share their pain. They needed an affectionate mother rather than the wrathful Father.[...] For the apostates and their descendants, St. Mary has become a mother who prays for God’s mercy on them.

[...]This shows that the original Christianity as the Father’s religion had begun to become a Mother’s religion. (And at the later stages, this Japanised Christianity got influenced by Shinto and Buddhism and mixed with them[...]) 240

On the other hand, Endo is also aware that such a strong guilty feeling is not typical of Japanese.

<Lack of sense of Guilt>

The second great theme in relation to the problem of evil, that shows up in Endo’s work is the lack of guilt. Endo is keenly aware, as one of the most serious problems for
the general Japanese people, that they do not have the sense of guilt. This awareness of Endo must be seen as relevant to his image of God, particularly to his idea of God as co-suffer in the pain and suffering of His people. Because, the lack of guilty conscience is closely related to the lack of the sense of absolute God of justice, whose image is traditionally that of God the father: for, as Cardinal J. H. Newman says,

If, as is the case, we feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened, at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is One to whom we are responsible, before whom we are ashamed, whose claim upon us we fear.25

In turn, where people are not suffering from guilty conscience, they tend to miss the awe to the righteous God and feel no fear of divine punishment or responsibility to be accountable to God for their own sinfulness.

Endo probes the moral apathy of Godless Japanese in the Sea and Poison, a story based on a historical fact of vivisection of a captivated American soldier in World War II. There, a medical student Toda who is going to attend the operation is aware that what he fears is “only other people’s eyes and social punishment,” and when he does not need to be afraid of these, “his fears will disappear.” He feels such a mentality of his own as ominous. He anticipates getting necessary retribution for his sin26, yet he is thinking it solely in social terms. Even after the vivisection, he says to himself, “Nothing is changed. My heart is not disturbed at all. The pangs of conscience, the stabs of guilt that I’ve waited for so long haven’t come at all. No dread at having killed a man. Why not? Why is my heart so impassive?”27 Then, as to the wrong deeds that he committed in the past, he remembers also thus:

I thought I have done something bad. Nevertheless, the remorse was not so poignant.[...] I think it was disgraceful for me to do such things. But thinking my
deeds were disgraceful and suffering because of them are two different matters.  

His moral apathy is such that he is himself troubled by it. Yet, as Akio Kasai remarks here, ordinary Japanese would not even take this lack of guilt so seriously and painfully. It is painful to Toda only because Endo has here projected himself who is a Catholic author and at the same time sharing what he sees to be the Japanese set of mind.  

Toda asks his colleague, Suguro, who is to attend the vivisection with him: “Do you think there’s a God?” Then, Suguro answers to him, representing what Endo sees as the typical Japanese,

“A God? [...] I don’t know what you’re talking about. [...] For myself, I can’t see any difference whether there’s a God or not.”

Yet, significantly, in Suguro, too, Endo projects his dilemma of being Japanese and yet cannot forget the Christian God of justice. In Songs of Sorrows, a sequel to The Sea and Poison, Suguro after all hangs himself, just like Judas. However, it is implied at the last moment, again, Endo’s maternal God of mercy intervenes and saves him from damnation.

Before he kills himself, he hears a voice of Jesus, trying to stop him: “Do not die! Please, please do not die!” Suguro answers him,

“Even if you were Jesus, you would not be able to save me. If there is a hell, it is the place exactly for such a one as I.”

“No, no, you will not go to hell!”

“Why not?”

“I know how you have been suffering. That pain is enough. So do not kill yourself, please!”

That voice was trying to persuade him so desperately as if that of a woman kneeling
before a man who is deserting her, begging him to love her once more.\(^{31}\)

Having seen this, we cannot simply say that Endo’s characters lack the sense of guilt. Rather, they represent Endo’s dilemma of being aware of guiltiness and at the same time conscious of the lack of the sense of guilt, conscious, too, of the resultant incapability of repentance and so apprehending that the way to salvation is closed on them. Perhaps, it may have something in common with the feeling of those first generation hidden Christians that Endo has seen as having guilty conscience for being apostates and yet unable to renounce their abjuration and die martyrs. They are not the characteristic Japanese Endo has in mind but characteristic Catholics in the Japanese soil.

More typically Japanese may be, then, Kichijiro in *Silence*, who, having officially renounced his faith, can still holds himself to be a Christian and complain to Rodrigues, “Why should God make me suffer this? Father, we haven’t done anything wrong.”\(^{32}\) Such self-righteousness is seriously worth remarking.

Logically speaking, as long as one lacks the sense of guilt, one would not see any necessity to be forgiven by any deity. Nor would that one see any point in Christ’s atonement on the cross. (For, what should Jesus atone for if it is not our sin?) Then, the most that such a one would find in Jesus should be the god who suffers together, the eternal companion and comforter. Therefore, I think it is natural that Endo’s God that is meant to be “understandable to Japanese people” is maternal and tender.

Significantly, we notice here that some of the Jewish people, who do not hold the Adam’s sin as inherent in all human beings living even now (there is no doctrine of inherent original sin in Judaism) and who do not see Jesus as the Saviour and sacrifice to atone for our sin, find a co-sufferer in God, when they desperately question about the goodness of God or His absence in face of their suffering. Elie Wiesel, a Jew who survived Auschwitz, remembers an occasion at the extermination camp when an innocent boy was hanged and his fellow Jews were all forced to observe the execution:
“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked. [...] 

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed. 

Behind me, I heard the same man asking: 

“Where is God now?” 

And I heard a voice within me answer him: 

“Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows....” 

That night the soup tasted of corpses.  

Here, we see a figure of saviour who shares man’s suffering to its extremity and sometimes bears it for them. It is also significant that, in this scene, Wiesel makes us notice that when the suffering is so outrageously unrighteous and inexplicable by any traditional notion of desert or God’s just punishment, the only answer may be God’s co-suffering. In fact, it does not seem to be so heretical or so rare to see Jesus as the eternal co-suffer, provided if the image is not taken as maternal. Paul Tillich also writes, 

God, as manifest in the Christ on the Cross, totally participates in the dying of a child, in the condemnation of the criminal, in the disintegration of a mind, in starvation and famine, and even in the human rejection of Himself.” 

Here, Tillich, too, seems to be seeing Christ in every man’s suffering. 

Karl Barth, too, commenting on the gospel of Mattew 9:36, “when he [Jesus] saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them,” remarks Jesus not only sympathized with the people but actually took the people’s suffering as his own. He says,
But the self-humiliation of God in His Son is genuine and actual, and therefore there is no reservation in respect of His solidarity with us. He did become—and this is the presupposition of all that follows—the brother of man, threatened with man, harassed and assaulted with him, with him in the stream which hurries downwards to the abyss, hastening with him to death, to the cessation of being and nothingness. With him He cries—knowing far better than any other how much reason there is to cry: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Deus *pro nobis* means simply that God has not abandoned the world and man in the unlimited need of his situation, but that He willed to bear this need as His own, that He took it upon Himself, and that He cries with man in this need[...].36

It is significant that in *Silence*, God’s voice “Tread on me,” is described as the voice heard by missionary in his mind. It is not presented as any supernatural yet objectively given message such as Moses and other prophets in the Old Testament are reported to have got. Rather, it is experienced inwardly by the missionary and therefore existential. When the priest asks God why He is keeping silence in face of the suffering of the Christians, who are tormented and even killed for God’s sake, he is thus revealed God as the greatest comforter, as the ultimate co-sufferer who would never desert the suffering people. This God may be seen as heretical, but in face of such a persecution as Rodrigues experiences (that was a historical fact, anyway), and in our age of eclipse of God, of all these wars, racial conflicts and the holocaust, Endo’s God may after all be also true.

Yet still, it should be admitted that the lack of sense of guilt, which is characteristic of Japanese people in Endo’s novels, is fatal in terms of the doctrine of salvation in orthodox Christianity of Latin churches. For, only when we are conscious that we need atonement for our sin but we are incapable of making sufficient atonement by ourselves, we understand the real salvific meanings of Jesus’ cross and come to see Jesus as the ransom
for our sin. In order to receive Jesus’ gospel as good news, we have to believe in not only God of Love but also God of Justice and punishment that sent Jesus to the cross. Endo, too, must have known that. Yet in spite of all that, Endo presents Jesus as co-sufferer, rather than the liberator from our sin. And it is because of his consciousness that Japanese people would not understand nor able to conceive the God of Justice who need to demand atonement for the sins of humanity.

When Endo died in 1996, Asahi News Paper called him as a novelist whose theme throughout his career had been “conflict between Christian belief and Japanese spiritual climate.” As I have discussed elsewhere, he found in his last years a way out of this conflict in John Hick’s religious pluralism, though since this solution does not much bear on our concern in this thesis, we shall not go into this matter any farther here.

<Conclusion—Endo’s theodicy and theodicy of the west today>

As we have seen, Endo’s answer to the problem of suffering is Jesus’ co-suffering with those who suffer. Christ figures in his novels are weak, passive, and suffer for love of others. This answer is much different from both Augustinian and Irenaeian answers to the problem of evil. In the Augustinian tradition, one may find salvation in Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. There, God is conceived of as almighty and believed to have sent his Son to save humankind. In the Irenaean tradition, one may expect salvation in his/her perfection. In either case, God is the absolute sovereign of the world, who is all powerful, and awful as well as merciful. And in either case, God is thought of as father figure, rather then maternal figure as in Endo’s novels.

Yet, interestingly, after Endo presented his maternal God, thinking it is heretical, western feminist theologians have become more and more conscious that God the creator in the Old Testament is expressed in maternal images as well as paternal ones. Susan Ashbrook Harvey points out the similarity of imagery between the spirit in Genesis 1:2
and mother bird flying over the nest of her children. Also, it is now widely recognized that Psalm 22:9-10 sees God as a midwife, bringing child into this world; while Deuteronomy 32:18 talks of God as a mother God who gave birth to her children. Therefore, it is not altogether heretical of Endo to see maternal image in the Christian saviour.

Moreover, we have to note that in the western theodicy today, there has appeared the third very prospective alternative, the process theodicy, which sees God not almighty absolute God of traditional Christianity but as a co-sufferer. This theodicy, derived from A. N. Whitehead’s process philosophy, is now most clearly and systematically advocated by David R. Griffin. He argues that God’s omnipotence is perfect, but it does not involve coercive power. Coercive power could be exercised only through body, and God, having no body, cannot coerce. He says those who believe in the traditional almighty God believe in a God who is strong enough to have prevented Auschwitz but did not. In Griffin’s view, what has ultimately the strongest is love, rather than any coercive power. With love, God sympathetically suffers with all those who suffer. Griffin holds that our life will turn out to have been meaningful when God by his Responsive Love preserves all that we have been in his consequent nature.

The difference and similarity between Griffin and Endo is clear. They both find a strong power in love, rather than any coercive power. They do not see God almighty, in terms of coercive power. However, the difference is that while Griffin thinks of salvation of the sufferers in their being remembered, and so kept in God, Endo seems to see consolation in the very fact of God’s co-suffering itself. In this, we may see another theologian who see great meaning in God’s nearness to the sufferers in their most painful time. It is Marilyn McCord Adams. She is keenly aware that the theoretical discussion of problem of evil rarely has enough saving power. Rather, she suggests we should see how God works for the suffering people: the fact that God is sometimes closest to them in their most terrible moment has itself a soteriological effect. She says,
Divine identification with human participation in horrors confers a positive aspect on such experiences by integrating them into the participant’s relationship with God. [...] Retrospectively, I believe, from the vantage point of heavenly beatitude, human victims of horrors will recognize those experiences as points of identification with the crucified God, and not wish them away from their life histories. [...] Hence, God’s identification with human participation in horrors,[sic] enables God to defeat their evil aspect within the course of the individual participant’s life. 

In these new current of theodicy in mind, we may conclude that Endo’s God who is the great co-suffer can be seen an embodiment of a very important aspect of God, the Saviour, and it is not heretical at all, though it is not comprehensive image of Christian God and Saviour, which is anyway beyond human description.

Notes
5) Richard A. Schuchert, “Translator’s Preface” to Endo, A Life of Jesus, pp.3-4.
6) Endo, A Life of Jesus, (Tokyo: Shincho, 1972), p.95; Unless otherwise stated, all the quotations are from Endo’s own Japanese edition and in my translation.
9) Endo, Silence, pp.146-147.
13) Endo, Silence, p.241, emphasis mine.
16) Endo, A Life of Jesus, p.225.


22) It is to be noticed that the flood story in Genesis 6:1-5 actually sees the direct cause of the flood not in the Adam’s sin but in misbehaviors of humanity mixed with giants.


30) Endo, *The Sea and Poison*, p.81


32) Endo, *Silence*, p.67. This remark is not exactly the question “Why is there any suffering of good people in the world which is supposed to be created by all powerful and all good God?” which is the traditional question of theodicy. Kichijiro’s question is based on the assumption that he is not a sinner, that he is not conscious of his original sin, and it is more like a cry for help than a theological question.


37) September 30, 1996.

38) In the diary on 5 September (Thu., 1991), he says, “Several days ago, I found a book on the second floor of Taiseido Bookstore[...]. It was Hick’s *Problems of Religious Pluralism*[...]. This shocking book has been overwhelming me[...]. And I am now absorbed in reading the same author’s *God has Many Names* that the editor of Iwanami publisher brought me as a gift.”

The religious pluralism, as is proposed by Hick (cf. *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Japanese tr. p.74, pp.88-89; As to Hick’s religious pluralism, cf. also, Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (Hamphire & London: Macmillan, 1989); *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (London: SCM, 1993) though they were not translated into Japanese in Endo’s life-time), is a position to regard the great world religions as respectively genuine (though not therefore perfect) human responses to the Transcendent, or to the Real, constituting contexts within which men and women are transformed from self-centredness to Reality-centeredness. Each world religion is culturally conditioned, yet they are all authentic contexts of salvation/liberation. It is different from Christian inclusivism in that it holds those world religions as equally good and valid alternative paths.

In a talk on *Deep River*, Endo said, “We usually choose our religion in our cultural tradition and environment. An Indian is likely to choose Hinduism, and an European is likely to choose Christianity, and so on[...]. When we think other religions as as authentic as our own, we could not, and must not, possibly deny their truth. Rather, I always think we should positively find another face of Jesus, another face of the Christian God, in the goodness and good parts of those other religious traditions.” Shusaku Endo and Otohiko Kaga, “On Deep River — Spiritual Concern” *Kokubungakku*, September 1993. This is exactly what Hick says in *God has Many Names* and also in *Problems of Religious Pluralism*. (cf. John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, tr. Hiromasa Mase
(Kyoto: Houzoukan, 1990), Ch. 5. pp.131-132; John Hick, God Has Many Names, tr. Hiromasa Mase (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1986), Ch. 4. pp.93-94.)


41) Griffin, God, Power & Evil, p.309.