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## Questimonial: Silence

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Shusaku Endo's masterpiece *Silence* tells the story of Sebastiao Rodrigues, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary sent to seventeenth-century Japan to investigate the rumored apostasy of his mentor, the priest Ferreira and offer assistance to persecuted Japanese Christians. Upon his arrival, Rodrigues finds that the Christians have been driven underground and hunted by government officials. Those that are captured are subjected to brutal methods of torture. Eventually, Rodrigues is captured and forced to make a cruel choice: recant his belief by trampling the image of Christ and end the suffering of his flock or refuse to renounce his faith while his followers are tortured.

Throughout his suffering, Rodrigues is haunted by his God's silence. Describing this sense of abandonment, Endo writes, "Behind the depressing silence of the sea, the silence of God... the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent." As I have considered the four curriculum questions – what should matter to me; how should we live together; how can we understand the world; what will I do – the reality is that I am confronted with the dread of silence. In my career as a legal aid attorney representing low-income renters facing evictions and housing discrimination, I too often feel silence when I think about what matters, how to understand the world, and how we should live together. Landlords unjustly evict and discriminate against tenants, and their children, constantly, and even in the cases that do come to our office, I can't do anything to stop it. When it feels like we have spent so much time considering these questions, how do we endure the silence of a world that doesn't share our answers?

Endo's plot isn't the key here and this would be a hopeless recommendation without this spoiler: Rodrigues' pain caused by the silence is alleviated. His God tells him, "Trample! Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all the feet that have stepped on this plaque. But that pain is not enough. I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason that I am here... I was not silent. I suffered beside you."

I have learned from Endo and *Silence* that as much as the silence makes us feel alone, we aren't. Whether it is from a God or gods, family or friends, or colleagues at work, we must find those who will not let us suffer alone. Those that we can be loud with. Those that won't let the rest of the world be silent.