

**Senior Summer Reading  
2020-2021**

Dear Seniors,

I am thrilled at the prospect of what this new academic year will hold for us. As literary travelling companions, we will begin our journey together in studying *The Literature of the Human Quest for Meaning*. I am honored to serve you as your teacher and guide along the way. Your required summer reading of Shūsaku Endō's novel *Silence* (沈黙, *Chinmoku*) will provide us with a common language from which we will draw during class discussions throughout the year and will serve as an anchor in our pursuit of a deeper understanding of God.

☞ In *Silence*, Japan's foremost novelist, Shūsaku Endō tells in novelized form the story of the harrowing persecution of a small Christian community in seventeenth-century when samurai were compelling Christians either to apostatize by trampling a holy image of Christ (an icon called the *fumie*) or be tortured and killed. Through Endō's development of Father Rodrigues as a man of faith determined to not cave in to the enemies of Christ, Endo wrestles with matters relevant to our own Christian life: the "anguish of faith and the mercy of God" and the "problems of . . . sin and betrayal, of martyrdom and apostasy" (vii, William Johnston, Translator).

As you read, pray that God will allow you to glimpse the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to hold sway over human hearts even in the vilest of circumstances. Good literature – what I call *real* literature – will invariably give you the sense that you are looking into a mirror. It may reveal what Blaise Pascal calls the void within and leave you wanting for more – more meaning, more depth, more transcendence, more grace, more Christ.

On a personal level, I recommend you keep a *private* written record of that which disturbs you in the reading of this novel; that which raises questions for you; that with which your inner being resonates or identifies. I have no doubt that this record of your responses will permeate your future reading in this course as well as your own spiritual journey. Make certain to read the great film director Martin Scorsese's Foreword, William Johnston's *Translator's Preface* with historical context for the novel, and the *Prologue* to the novel as well.

**Writing in Response to *Silence***

Your first essay of the year will be your response to *Silence*. In order to adequately prepare for this writing, please thoroughly **peruse my reading guide below**. **Keep the three writing topics in mind as you read** and **make careful textual notations as you read**. As you read, you will gain a clear sense of the topic you should choose. I do not expect you to write the essay during your summer break, but I highly recommend that you make **preparatory notes** throughout your reading while your thoughts are fresh. Having the opportunity to voice your thoughts during our discussions of the novel in the fall will impact your further thinking as well as your writing.

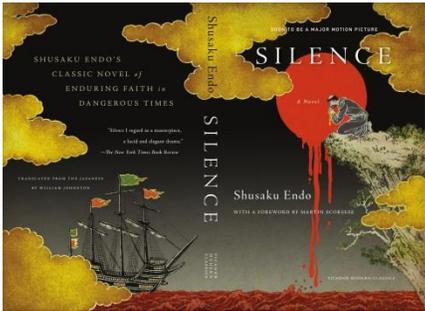
☞ If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me at my home account: [sharon.jamesledbetter@gmail.com](mailto:sharon.jamesledbetter@gmail.com) or text me at (773)744-8063.

With high anticipation for what God has in store for us, *Mrs. Ledbetter*

<sup>1</sup> van Leusden, Paul. *Lost in a Storm without a Chart: Shūsaku Endō's Father Rodrigues through the Eyes of Jean Paul Sartre*. University of Utrecht, July / August 2012.

## Reading and Writing Guide

☞ Please purchase this particular edition of the book: **ISBN: 978-1-250-08224-4**



### Main Characters

- *Father Sebastian Rodrigues*, the Portuguese priest and missionary to Japan whose spiritual struggles and temptation to deny Christ form the central drama of the novel;
- Father Rodrigues' mentor, *Father Christovao Ferreira*, who is rumored to have apostatized;
- *Kichijiro*, the Judas figure who shadows Rodrigues throughout the novel as both his betrayer and his parishioner; and
- *Inoue*, the malevolent magistrate who captures Rodrigues and threatens him with torture if he will not trample the *fumie* - the face of Christ.

### Background

Shūsaku Endō's novel *Silence* depicts the first Christian missionaries stepping foot on Japanese soil in the 15th and 16th centuries. According to Paul van Leusden<sup>1</sup> of the University of Utrecht "in the Netherlands, these missionaries strove to integrate local Japanese traditions into their own Christian message. But when the Church in Rome banned this approach as “dilution of and even heresy toward faith . . . Christianity [was] . . . regarded as a tyrannical force” and later as a tool to spread colonialism. Christianity was seen as a “direct threat to Japanese identity . . . forcing” a convert to Christianity “to give up everything that made him Japanese” (31). A Christian convert was seen as being trapped between two cultures, between Shintoism, a “religious system of thought and values . . . at the core of Japanese culture” (32) and Christianity. Considering the great historic opposition to Christianity as an outside Western phenomenon and the fact that in modern-day Japan, Christians only make up between one and six percent of the total population of Japan (32), it is rather remarkable, then, that the people of Japan revered Shūsaku Endō (1923-96) as a beloved national treasure despite their knowing that he was a Christian. He missed winning the 1994 Nobel Prize by a hair's breadth, some say because he was a Christian and his Gospel-centric writing made him an outsider. Nevertheless, the presses kept rolling and Endō's books kept selling, illuminating Japanese readers with the Light of the World. We know that his *true* prize was a heavenly prize.

### Scriptural Perspective

You may find it helpful to conduct a topical study of persecution in Scripture. What does Jesus have to say to the Church – to us – about persecution for His name? This study will help to provide an anchor for your writing. Jesus said, “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one” (*ESV*, John 10:29-30).

<sup>1</sup> van Leusden, Paul. *Lost in a Storm without a Chart: Shūsaku Endō's Father Rodrigues through the Eyes of Jean Paul Sartre*. University of Utrecht, July / August 2012.

## ☞ Writing Topics, Considerations, and Guidelines

Good writing requires authenticity and vulnerability. Before I approach any writing – whether writing my novel, a poem, a letter, a talk, or even an assignment for my students – I always pray to ask God for wisdom and words – the *right* words. It makes sense to do this, as He is the Living Word. Therefore, I recommend that your first step in approaching this reading and writing assignment is to pray for God’s partnership in the process. You may find that you have begun a lifelong practice.

Now, you are ready to choose *one* of the following three topics for your first essay of the year:

### ☞ Topic One: The Denial of God

*Considerations for Topic One:*

It is unthinkable that we would ever deny Christ in the face of extreme persecution! Or is it? Each must surely wonder: *Am I at heart a Judas who would betray Christ outright for perceived personal gain? Am I a Peter who loves Christ dearly, but in a moment of panic, motivated by self-preservation, would deny him, only to be plunged into deep remorse? Or am I a Stephen? Would I be faithful to the end?* Where do we fit on this spectrum? How can we even begin to imagine unless we actually were to face persecution? In the 1930s, Dietrich Bonhoeffer posed a question to his young seminary students: “How can we expect to die for Christ if we do not first live for Him?”

*Preparatory Research for Topic One:*

In order to write this essay, you should read what the Scriptures have to say about Judas Iscariot and what Jesus says about persecution for His name.

*Prompt for Topic One:*

Part I of the Essay: Trace the anatomy of Father Rodrigues' doubt and apostasy. At what point is his first seed of doubt planted? What feeds the doubt? What causes him to apostatize?

Part II of the Essay: Can Father Rodrigues’ apostasy be justified? Must the Father apostatize in order to manifest Christ’s love? By the end of the novel, is Father Rodrigues still a Christian at heart? Using textual evidence and Scripture, argue either that his act of apostasy is actually the ultimate act of faith in God, or argue that it is a base failure akin to that of Judas in Scripture. Can there be redemption for Father Rodrigues?

<sup>1</sup> van Leusden, Paul. *Lost in a Storm without a Chart: Shūsaku Endō’s Father Rodrigues through the Eyes of Jean Paul Sartre*. University of Utrecht, July / August 2012.

## ☞ **Topic Two: The Silence of God**

### *Considerations:*

“Kichijiro was trying to express something different, something even more sickening. The silence of God. [ ... ] the black soil of Japan had been filled with the lament of so many Christians; the red blood of priests has flowed profusely; the walls of the churches have fallen down; and in the face of this terrible and merciless sacrifice offered up to him, God has remained silent” (Endō).

When Ichizo and Mokichi are executed, Father Rodrigues questions his whole belief system as even now “[ ... ] God remains with folded arms, silent” (Endō).

Father Rodrigues prays “Lord, why are you silent? Why are you always silent.....?” (Endō).

### *Prompt for Essay Two:*

Part I of the Essay: Do you concur with Kichijiro’s plaintive question and Father Rodrigues’ painful conclusion that God is being silent? Using textual evidence, trace the key moments of silence as Father Rodrigues and Kichijiro see it.

Part II of the Essay: Though it appears that God is silent in the ways documented in Part I of your essay, using textual evidence argue that God’s voice and presence, in truth, permeate the events of the novel. Prove that the presence of Christ is there all along, having chosen to suffer alongside His believers. Is God present even in Father Rodrigues’ apostasy?

Part III of the Essay: Using Scripture, other texts (optional), and your experience with God, why does God appear to remain absent and silent through His servants’ suffering? Can you defend God’s silence? Is there a good reason for it? What does God say about His own silence? Have you felt His silence in your life? How did you push through the silence?

## ☞ **Topic Three: The Love of God**

Using textual evidence and Scripture define true love as manifested in *Silence* - both the Love of the Divine for His followers and the Love for God manifested by His followers for the Divine. Trace these manifestations of Love, of the Face of Christ with all its beauty, the face of the Beloved. Was Father Rodrigues’ apostasy the height of love or the ultimate betrayal?

<sup>1</sup> van Leusden, Paul. *Lost in a Storm without a Chart: Shūsaku Endō’s Father Rodrigues through the Eyes of Jean Paul Sartre*. University of Utrecht, July / August 2012.