

**Canterbury House of Studies  
Middle School  
The Early Church: The Bible to the Nicene Creed  
Syllabus 2020-2021**

**THE PRAYER:**

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

**THE INSTRUCTOR:**

Rhea Bright

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405-831-6631

Office hours: Wednesday 9:30-10:30 a.m. and 2:45-3:45 p.m. ET

I am always happy to answer questions or address and concerns that students or parents may have. Please email me anytime, or text or call between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Eastern time to set up a time to talk. I will get back to you as soon as possible. When you contact me, please give me some idea of what times are good for you and what time zone you are in. I am in Atlantic time, which is 1 hour ahead of Eastern Time.

**THE STUDENT:**

This course is for middle school students who:

- are interested in reading and understanding the Bible.
- want to learn what the (universal) church believes and why.
- can read at a middle school level.
- can form paragraphs easily.
- will follow instructions on marking a book, writing summaries, taking notes, and writing short essays.
- can understand the difference between a literal and metaphorical meaning.

**THE CURRICULUM:**

While Canterbury House is a programme of studies dedicated to rediscovering and renewing a lively Anglican heritage of theology, scripture reading and prayer, this course in Early Church

History is the study of a time when the church was undivided in the sense of modern “denominations”, but when there was still a diversity of opinions about the theological and doctrinal meaning of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. It is a course that would appeal to anyone interested in a survey of the Bible and the development of the beliefs, rites and practices of the Early Church. We will be looking at Biblical interpretation in a way that is as true to the Patristic (Early Church) understanding as possible.

The course starts with reading significant portions of the Old and New Testaments to trace the story of creation, fall and redemption. They will discover the Biblical message about God’s goodness, human sin, and the need for a Savior. Students will learn key terms (covenant, exodus, law, sacrifice, prophet, disciple, apostle, passion, great commission, etc.), key figures (Adam & Eve, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, Ruth, Mary, Zachariah, Elisabeth, John the Baptist etc.), and important theological ideas (creation, fall, sin, atonement, incarnation, resurrection, grace, charity, etc.). They will learn about the fourfold sense of scriptural interpretation and the importance of each: the literal, allegorical, tropological (moral) and eschatological. We will use the Authorized Version of the Bible, commonly called the King James Version, as our class text, but students are encouraged to use other versions at home to help with their understanding of the readings. Some recommended versions are the RSV and the ESV. The desire is for students to become increasingly comfortable with the language of the KJV, which is the Bible most often quoted or paraphrased in English literature, and which has a strong memorable resonance.

The second part of the course looks at the history of the Church from the time of the apostles through to the ecumenical councils of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries: the teaching of the Apostles, the conversion of the gentiles, the practices of the early church such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper, persecution and martyrdom, the successors to the apostles (known as the Church Fathers), the Apostles Creed, the establishment of the canon of scriptures, the controversies over the nature of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity to the final form of the Nicene Creed. Marcellino D’Ambrosia’s book *When the Church Was Young* will provide our entry into this time. Occasional supplemental material will be provided.

## **THE GOALS:**

- To become comfortable reading the Bible, and to spend time pondering the meaning of the text in multiple senses.
- To understand and be able to narrate or summarize the Biblical narrative of creation, fall and redemption.
- To recognize key terms and figures from the Bible and early Church history.
- To begin to appreciate the importance of doctrine in the Christian religion, and to have a basic understanding of what is meant by the Incarnation and Trinity.

## **THE METHOD:**

Students will be given a reading assignment for each class, accompanied by a few questions intended to direct the student to what is most important in the reading for the purposes of this course. Students will also be directed at times to mark in their text in order to make note of key names or terms. Students should expect to spend almost as much time preparing for class as they will spend in class.

Class time will be spent drawing out the essential meaning of the readings through Socratic discussion. Students will be directed to take additional notes as necessary, and will be given time at the end of class to write a few sentences summarizing the main points of the reading and discussion in a commonplace journal. This journal will become a helpful tool for the student to write short essays on assigned topics. Journal entries should be scanned and sent to Mrs Bright by noon the next day for comment and approval.

At strategic points, students will be asked to write short compositions on selected topics in order to cement and clarify their understanding and to develop their writing skills. They will be given clear instructions about is expected, and will receive feedback both on the content of the composition and on their spelling, grammar, writing style and clarity.

## **THE MATERIALS:**

Come to class every day with the text under discussion (read and suitably marked), pencil or pen and paper, a planner, and a composition book to use as a commonplace book.

## **THE READINGS:**

1. Bible, KJV  
[Students are permitted, even encouraged, to use other translations of the Bible to help their understanding of the assigned readings, but we will be reading and quoting from the Authorized Version (the KJV) in class, so students are required to read from the KJV and to bring it to class.]
2. *When the Church Was Young*, Marcellino D'Ambrosio
3. Handouts such as: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Quicumque vult (also called the Creed of St Athanasius)

## **THE SCHEDULE:**

- Class days:  
Monday and Wednesday 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. Eastern Time for 32 weeks
- Orientation:  
Monday August 31.

- Semester 1 Class dates Sept. 9 to Jan. 20:  
 September 9, 14, 16, 21, 23, 28, 30  
 October 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21, 26, 28  
 November 2, 4, 9, 11, 16, 18, 30 [Thanksgiving Break: Nov. 23-27]  
 December 2, 7, 9, 14, 16 [Christmas Break: Dec. 21-Jan. 8]  
 January 11, 13, 18, 20
- Semester 2 Class dates Jan 27 to May 26:  
 January 25, 27  
 February 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17 [Winter Break: Feb. 22-26]  
 March 1, 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24 [Holy Week/Easter Break: March 29-April 2]  
 April 5, 7, 12, 14, 19, 21, 26, 28  
 May 3, 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26
- In case of cancellation due to illness, family emergency, internet problems, etc, I will get a substitute, record a makeup session, or provide an alternative assignment in lieu of class that day.

## EVALUATION:

We desire for students to cultivate scholarly virtues and habits of diligence, patience, and persistence. Cultivating habits and acquiring virtues takes time and encouragement. I will provide the following grades in order to help students and their parents assess if the student is moving adequately toward those goals. Students will receive marks on a scale from *non satis* to *magna cum laude* (see below). Note that *magna cum laude* is, by definition, an uncommon accolade. I will also post letter or numerical grades accessible to parents.

- Contributions to class discussion will receive an assessment every two weeks which will reflect the student's participation and engagement with the texts and ideas over that two-week period. Absences (exceptions are made for religious observances), tardiness, and being unprepared or disrespectful all contribute to being *non satis*.
- The twice weekly commonplace journal entries will receive a completion grade of *satis* or *non satis*, along with comments as necessary. There will be no numerical grades for this.
- Longer writing assignments will receive qualitative grades of *non satis* to *magna cum laude*.

<i>Magna cum laude</i>	with great praise	Especially and unusually fine work. This is not common.
<i>Cum laude</i>	with praise	Very good work done by the average student. This should be common.
<i>Satis</i>	satisfactory	Adequate work that is completed as assigned and on time.
<i>Non satis</i>	unsatisfactory	Work that is incomplete, poorly executed, or late.

We all have different gifts and abilities. I will attempt to guide students toward being better students, and I am always willing to have those conversations. I cannot, however, guide a student toward a particular grade, and I do not think such conversations are ever fruitful.