



**Course:** Classics of Christendom-History

**Meeting Time:** T/TH 11:00 am (EST)

**Instructor:** Mr. Casey McCall

**Email:** [casey@ashlandlex.org](mailto:casey@ashlandlex.org)

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Meeting Place:** Zoom Classroom

## Course Description

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past. Not that the past has any magic about it, but because we cannot study the future, and yet need something to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion. A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.”

This course introduces 11th–12th graders (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders welcome with instructor approval) to some of the great texts of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation which have influenced the development of both Christian culture and the secular west. While studying these texts, students explore the ideas, events, and figures that molded societies from the Middle Ages through the Reformation.

This course focuses on history, but we look at that history largely through primary texts of the period we are studying. Some external sources are used to provide additional and helpful reference material to put our readings in context. Students are asked to examine these texts for their wisdom and virtue, noting the ways in which the author’s ideas interact with those of others and contribute to what we call western civilization.

Occasionally, the teacher will present additional historical context through brief lectures, but otherwise classes are seminar-style discussions on the classical texts. Students are assessed for their interest, participation, and diligence during discussions, as well as by means of short response papers and essays.

This class is paired with our high school course Classics of Christendom Literature, taught by the same teacher and scheduled back-to-back with that course in a block. Students who take both courses receive a discount. This course may also be taken as a stand-alone history study.

## Course Objectives

- Develop familiarity with classic texts from Medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation periods
- Develop historical awareness by learning the 5 C’s of history

- Grow in recognition and love for truth, beauty, and goodness through thoughtful engagement with course texts
- Expand vocabulary to include the language of virtue, wisdom, and philosophy toward the goal of moral formation
- Produce written works that show depth of engagement with course texts

## Course Map

### Quarter 1

- Collapse of Roman Empire and Barbarian invasions
- Monasticism and the Rule of St. Benedict
- Primary Texts:
  - Augustine, *City of God*
  - *Life of St. Benedict*
  - *Rule of St. Benedict*

### Quarter 2

- Conversion of Britain
- Byzantium and the Iconoclast Controversy
- The growth and spread of Islam
- East-west friction
- Primary Texts:
  - Bede
  - *On the Divine Images*

### Quarter 3

- Crusades
- High Middle Ages: Romanesque and Gothic architecture, castles, and rise of towns, universities, and scholasticism
- Renaissance politics
- Primary Texts:
  - *Chronicles of the Crusades*
  - *The Summa of the Summa*
  - Machiavelli, *The Prince*

### Quarter 4

- Renaissance art
- Reformation
- Counter-Reformation
- Primary Texts:
  - *Lives of the Artists*
  - *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*

## Required Texts:

Most of these texts are in translation. Students will need the posted translation and ISBN. Digital versions are not acceptable – student require printed texts. They will need their own text (not a family library copy) as they will be expected to annotate and mark up the text.

1. *Penguin Historical Atlas of the Medieval World* 978-0141014494
2. Augustine, *City of God* 978-0140448948
3. *Early Christian Lives* 978-0140435269
4. *The Rule of St. Benedict* 978-0814612729
5. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 978-0199537235
6. John Damascene, *On the Divine Images* 978-0881412451
7. *Chronicles of the Crusades* 978-0140449983
8. Peter Kreeft, *The Summa of the Summa* 978-0898703009
9. *Atlas of the European Reformations* 978-1451499698
10. Machiavelli, *The Prince* 978-0140449150
11. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists* 978-0199537198
12. Foxe, *The Book of Martyrs* 978-0199236848

## Course Requirements:

**Reading** – Students will be given a reading assignment for each class, often 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 be asked to mark key terms in the text as they read, identify the main point or argument of the reading, and write a summary sentence or two in their commonplace journals before coming to class.

**Class Discussions** – Class time will be spent drawing out the essential meaning of the readings through Socratic discussion. The reading will be discussed by all present. The teacher will provide any necessary background, history, clarification, and assistance to the understanding of the argument or key points. Students will be directed to take additional notes as necessary.

**Commonplace Journal** – At the end of each class, students will be directed to write a paragraph summarizing one or two of the main points of the reading and discussion in a commonplace journal. This journal will become a helpful tool for the student to write essays on assigned topics. Whenever possible, there will be some time at the end of class given to the students to work on this. Journal entries should be sent to Mr. McCall before the next meeting.

**Writing Assignments** – At the end of each text, student will write an essay or other type of composition on that text. At the end of each semester, students may be asked to write a longer essay on a topic that requires tracing a theme or idea over multiple readings. The purposes of the writing exercises are both to practice and improve writing skills and to think deeply about important ideas. Students will be given clear instructions about what is expected and will receive feedback on the content of the composition and on their spelling, grammar, writing style and clarity.

## Student Expectations:

Our classes will be live and highly interactive with students expected to interact with their instructor and peers and to participate in class discussions. Students are expected to attend classes with their videos turned on and to function as a full participant in each class, contributing to the class dynamic and success of the entire cohort. Students who do not turn on their videos during class will be removed from the Zoom classroom and marked absent.

## Evaluation Procedures and Grading Criteria

Instructors will often assign the following grades based on students' level of achievement: *magna cum laude* (with great praise), *cum laude* (with praise), *satis* (sufficient, satisfactory), and *non satis* (not sufficient). Ideally, every average student working diligently should do praiseworthy work (*cum laude*). Those who excel beyond this expectation will be the *magna cum laude* students. Students who do adequate but not praiseworthy work should be designated *satis*. *Non satis* means lacking sufficiency or adequacy. These assessments are not mere grading instruments but ways for both the student and the instructor to assess mastery. Students will receive written feedback on each essay.

If students need to complete a high school transcript with either a numeric or letter grade, please communicate with the instructor, and the school's normal process will be followed.

Students' grades will be comprised of:

1. Reading and Class Discussions (30%)
2. Daily Summaries (30%)
3. Writing Assignments (40%)

## Academic Dishonesty

In the event that a concern arises regarding academic dishonesty, the instructor will follow the process outlined in the school handbook. It is important that students pursue their studies with integrity and honesty. The instructor will reserve final judgment on any suspected academic dishonesty until the facts of the matter are revealed and all appropriate authorities are contacted.

## Contacting Me

Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns you may have. I will **usually** respond within the 24-hour period but may not be able to respond before then. If there is an issue or concern that requires discussion of details, I'll be happy for us to set up a Zoom appointment to talk instead.

## Technology

Each student will need a computer with webcam and a high-speed internet connection. Also, a headset is highly recommended for clear communication. Each student will create an account on Schoology, our learning management system. The instructor will post all media and any general communication on Schoology. Please be sure to adjust your settings so that you are notified when memos are posted to this group.