

## RS 460 Moral Theology

Christian Brothers University

Course Syllabus – Fall 2020

### Teacher Information:

William F. Slavney, M.A.  
wslavney@cbu.edu  
(901) 321 – 3111 (office)  
(901) 484 – 2335 (cell)  
Thomas Center

### Office Hours

Mon. 12:00 pm – 4:30pm  
Tues. 12:30 pm – 2:00 pm  
Wed. 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm  
Thurs. 12:30 pm – 4:30 pm  
Fri. 12:30 pm – 4:30pm

**Required Materials:** The following texts will be used during the semester and are required for this course. Any edition of a text is acceptable unless specified otherwise below.

- Mattison III, William C. *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*. United States, Baker Publishing Group, 2008.
- John Paul II, Pope. *The Splendor of Truth: Veritatis Splendor, Encyclical Letter*. United States, St. Paul Books & Media, 1993.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd Edition. United States, Crown Publishing Group, 2012.

**Course Description:** A study of the foundations of the Christian moral life, including freedom and moral agency, moral norms and moral reasoning, the place of scripture, tradition, and authority in the moral life, virtues and development of moral character. The course format will consist of lectures and discussions.

**Course Objectives:** This course will introduce students to moral theological thinking from a Catholic perspective. The primary purpose of this course is to help all of us think in a more critical and knowledgeable way about decisions we are called upon to make, from major conclusions about career and family to seemingly trivial choices in our daily activities. Moral theology also helps us think about which decisions are most important, what constitutes “the good life,” and what makes a person “good.” In order for us to achieve these general purposes, you must be able to:

- explain important concepts in the history of ethical thought
- name some of the varied sources for the moral norms in moral theology
- identify what is specifically Christian and Catholic about this ethical enterprise
- assess problems with speaking of a “Christian” ethics or a “moral theology”
- examine moral theology in relation to contemporary moral issues/problems
- choose and defend ethical positions related to these issues
- construct moral theological arguments in support of these positions
- analyze the implications of our investigations for the daily lives of Christians.

**Classroom Professionalism:** It is good to form a habit of behaving in a professional manner. Behavior that is prohibited includes: the use of inappropriate language; playing with cell phones, tablets, laptops, and calculators in class; falling asleep; being disrespectful to the professor or fellow classmates; not addressing a teacher (or any faculty) by his/her appropriate title; putting legs/feet on tables or desks. If a student engages in any of this behavior, he/she may be removed from the class.

**Attendance Policy:** Students are expected to attend class on time every day, to complete all textbook reading before class, and to participate in class discussions regularly. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting.

Students accumulating more than three absences will have their final grade reduced by a letter grade for each additional absence. It is the policy of Christian Brothers University that no student can pass a course in which he/she has been absent for 20% of the class meetings. Consequently, students who miss more than six classes will automatically fail the course. On a student's seventh absence, a grade of "F" will be given for the semester. Consistent lateness will be subject to a five point deduction off the final grade for each additional tardy occurrence after the first tardy.

**Grades:** The work that you do and the learning that you accomplish in this class are more important than your grade. I am aware that grades are important to you. However, if you come speak to me about your performance in this course, expect that our conversation will be about how to improve your work or your understanding of the material, not about how to improve your grade.

**Grading Policy:** Letter grade assignments for this course will conform to the Christian Brothers University standard scale.

100 – 90 = A / 89 – 80 = B / 79 – 70 = C / 69 – 60 = D / 59 & below = F

Grading in this course will be based on the total points earned over the total possible points. I do not and will not round your final grade. If you have an 97.99% you will have a 97.0 (A) average for the course.

**Exams:** There will be four in-class exams and a comprehensive final exam, each is worth 100 points. Study guides for exams will be posted on my website typically four (4) to five (5) days prior to the date of the test. I will not curve your test grades. If you miss a test for any reason, you need to notify me no later than the day after the test to set up a time for a make-up exam. Should you miss that make up date, you will receive a zero on that test and move forward. If you did not see me about a missed test within 24-48 hours...take a nice fat zero. (That can really hurt your grade!) *In accordance with Christian Brothers University policy, there are no make-up opportunities for a missed final exam. I will be forced to give you a zero. No Exceptions.*

**Quizzes:** There will generally be one quiz per week, but there also may be pop quizzes. They will generally be very short and held at the very beginning of class. Quizzes are each worth 10 points and 10 of them will be counted. Since I plan to give many of these quizzes, (at least 15) I will drop the extra ones. Quizzes will tend to cover information in the readings, homework, and class lectures. Quizzes cannot be made up. If you are absent and or late and miss a quiz, you will receive a zero on that quiz. I will let you know at the beginning of the quiz exactly how much time you will have. Quizzes will typically be multiple choice and true or false, but they may also be in short answer form.

**Homework:** A variety of homework/in class assignments will be given throughout the duration of this course. Sometimes it may be as simple as a reading assignment to something as complicated as a reading analysis/synopsis essay. Any homework must be turned in using the proper format and on time. Under no circumstances will a late or incorrectly formatted homework assignment be accepted; an automatic zero will be awarded. There may be some extra credit opportunities during the semester, but there is no guarantee.

**Projects/Papers:** You will write four formal papers, each of which are worth 50 points, during the semester. These papers are graded on grammar, format, and structure of your argument and not the position you take. These papers must be typed in the given format or else they will not be accepted, meaning a zero will be given. Formatting for the projects will be strictly enforced. Formal typed assignments may not be limited to projects. Specific details of individual project requirements will be given at the time that the project or assignment is assigned.

**Late Work:** I do not take late work unless permission has been granted at least 24 hours in advance of the due date. Just because you ask for an extension, you are not guaranteed an extension. End of story!

**Assignment Formatting:** All work should be turned in as I specify in the guidelines. Work must be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins on all sides. Every writing assignment should include an MLA-style header and the according title. Work that is submitted that does not meet the formatting guidelines will not receive higher than a D, assuming that everything else is perfect.

**E-mail Policy:** When writing e-mails to your professors, you should include both a salutation (e.g. "Dear Mr. Slavney,") and a complimentary close/signature (e.g. "Thanks for your time! –Max"). You should also specifically state which class you're in (e.g. "I'm in your 9:30am RS 200 course.") I do not accept any assignments via e-mail unless I explicitly request them that way. I also do not proofread or edit assignment drafts. Draft your assignments early and bring them into my office hours well before the deadline if you would like to receive feedback or guidance on an assignment.

**Office Hours:** Don't be scared of coming to office hours! I genuinely enjoy talking to my students outside of class. If you're struggling or confused by some aspect of the class, don't wait until you're failing—come see me! However, don't feel like you need to have a major crisis. You're perfectly welcome to stop by for a casual chat or general guidance/questions. If you're not taking advantage of your professors' office hours, you're not fully taking advantage of the college experience. Individual access to experts in a variety of fields is a big part of what you're paying for.

**Academic Honesty:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. All policies for academic honesty will be strictly enforced in all that you do for this course.

Grades are given as an evaluation of your work. Any attempt to pass somebody else's work as your own or being found in violation of academic honesty will earn you a grade of a F for the course as well as a possible academic dismissal from the institution.

**Plagiarism:** (including self-plagiarism - using and submitting a paper from a previous course) Plagiarism is defined as intentionally or unintentionally copying someone else's work and claiming it as your own. In addition, academic dishonesty includes allowing someone else, such as a friend or family member, to edit or rewrite assignments. Plagiarism may occur intentionally or unintentionally, but intent is not a factor in determining whether plagiarism has occurred or what consequences apply. An analogy is the licensed driver who is responsible for knowing and abiding by the rules of the road. Ignorance does not excuse the driver if a law is broken. Likewise, a writer is responsible for knowing and using the rules for being accurate and honest in his or her writing. Pleading ignorance of the rules does not prevent the consequences from being applied. Any case of plagiarism in this course will result in an F in the course and possible expulsion from the university depending on the discretion of the professor.

**Confidentiality of Academic Work:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 recognizes specific rights held by you as a student. These include your right to consent or denial of disclosure of your academic records, including any and all grades pertaining to this course. In accord with FERPA, apart from the following stated exceptions, I will not discuss your personal academic work in this course with anyone without your written consent, as filed with the Registrar. The exceptions are: 1) reporting your grades at the end of the

semester to the Registrar, 2) cases where performance in the course is low to the point of potential failure in the final grade, in which case I may consult with the Academic Dean, 3) cases where, in my estimation, you may present a danger to yourself or to others.

Students, of course, are free to discuss the specifics of their personal academic performance with whomever they wish. However, the instructor will not be held responsible for any disclosures made by the student on the student's own volition, or for any consequences of such self-disclosures.

**Students with Disabilities:** Any student who may need class or test accommodations based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to speak with CBU's Dean of Students privately to discuss your specific needs. Students with disabilities should also contact Student Disability Services in the Thomas Center at (901) 321-3536. Student Disability Services coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability or difference that requires assistance from the Office of Disability Services, please bring me documentation so that we can ensure that the proper arrangements will be made for you.

**Lastly, An Important Note to My Students: I CARE ABOUT YOU AND I TAKE YOU VERY SERIOUSLY!**

YOU, the student, as a whole person, are my top priority as a teacher. Given the rigor of the course, and the fact that students are often participating in other school and community activities or obligations, at times significant stress can result. While stress is normal (and can actually be a positive thing in the right circumstances), it should never be suffocating. Students should first and foremost know that the language of my classroom is one of love and laughter. Your well-being matters more to me than any test score or grade could ever mean. You should also know that my door is always open to you, and I am here to listen and provide as much support as I can. If the workload of the course becomes overwhelming, please come talk to me individually, so that we can strategize how to make things work while also accomplishing the objectives of the course. College courses are not for everyone, and there is no shame in struggling. Honors courses and grades do not define who you are as a person or as a student. Sometimes, through absolutely no fault of our own, the weight of the stresses and emotions in our lives become overwhelming. Students should know that I, and other staff members at the university, including our professionally trained guidance counselors, are always willing to listen free of judgement. However, if you do not feel comfortable talking with me or someone else here, a few important free numbers that you can utilize 24/7/365 are:

- **Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" to 741741**  
Every person who texts is connected with a Crisis Counselor, an actual person trained to bring you from a difficult moment to a cool calm through active listening and collaborative problem solving, and provide further resources as necessary.
- **TrevorText for LGBTQ College Students: Text TREVOR to 1-202-304-1200**  
TrevorText is a confidential and secure resource that provides live help for LGBTQ college students with a trained specialist.
- **The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255**  
A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

***Note:*** I reserve the right to make any changes to this syllabus and its accompanying directives as circumstances internal or external to our learning experience may unfold in unanticipated ways throughout the semester.