

STANDARD SYLLABUS

**Christian Marriage**  
**THEO 293**

This course will consider a critical methodology for addressing the following and other questions, utilizing an exploration of historical understandings from the Hebrew and Greek biblical literature, from the theological writings of the Patristic and Medieval Eras, from the contributions of the Protestant Reformation, and from Church documents emanating in the Modern Era. Contemporary scholarship, especially in the assigned readings, will complete the sources utilized in this course.

**Knowledge Area(s) satisfied:** Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge  
**Skill(s) Developed:** Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions  
**Values Requirement(s) satisfied:** Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World

**Learning Objectives:**

**Knowledge Area (Theological and Religious Studies Knowledge):**

1. Students will identify the character of the Patriarchal culture, evident in biblical texts and secular antiquity, residues of which remain in many cultures today.
2. Students will understand the classic ends of marriage as unity and procreation, why these are normative, and how culture today challenges these twin ends, e.g., in the advancement by some of the worth of same-sex marriage or, at least, same-sex unions.
3. Students will come to see the development of marital unity from the patriarchal sense that the wife is property of the husband to more nuanced views, that the wife is complementary to the husband, equal to the husband, and that their relationship is more properly understood as mutuality.
4. Students will study alternative understandings of marriage, for example, the pre-Christian Canaanite fertility cults, the Protestant similarities and differences, the notion of arranged marriages evident in some Asian cultures, etc.
5. Students will recognize the connection between the permanence of marriage and the possibility of ecclesiastical annulment of marriage, the definition of annulment, and the conditions under which it might be granted.
6. Students will consider practical best practices consonant with Christianity, including the acquisition of listening skills, the art of argumentation within marriage as a useful form of communication, and a variety of theories regarding parenting skills.
7. Students will learn the conclusions of contemporary sociological data regarding premarital cohabitation.

8. Overall, students will be introduced to the biblical, philosophical, historical, sociological, ethical, and psychological data necessary for a wholistic understanding of Christian marriage.

### **Skills (Critical Thinking Skills and Dispositions):**

The student will come to a contemporary understanding of Christian marriage, how this understanding evolved from antiquity through the modern age, and the varieties within different societies of the practices associated with wedding rituals and the concrete living out of the commitments of marriage, that is, permanence, fidelity, and the mutual right to bear and raise children. The student will analyze and interpret religious texts, beliefs, and practices relevant to marriage, using standard scholarly methods and tools. The student will sort through a variety of interpretations of the meaning of marriage and, using critical reasoning, discern why and how these interpretations might contribute to the understanding of marriage. Critical thinking skills in theological knowledge will be addressed in several ways, including the following:

1. Students will comprehend, paraphrase, summarize, and contextualize the meaning of biblical and Church primary texts related to the understanding of the nature of marriage. They will also consider scholarly arguments about these texts.
2. Students will develop strategies for seeking and synthesizing data to support arguments they seek to make about the materials under investigation in the class and to critique arguments found in the assigned readings or classroom lectures and discussions.
3. In particular and by way of example, students will both study and critique Scott Peck's distinction between love and the feeling of love. His excellent analysis also invites critical consideration of some possible weaknesses in his argument, which students will be invited to explore.
4. Students will also receive the critical judgment about the course materials offered by the instructor, with an invitation to compare his judgment with theirs. They will thereby construct their own understanding and judgment and arrive at a degree of confidence in their own considered opinions.

### **Values Area (Understanding Spirituality or Faith in Action in the World):**

The relationship between the understanding of the nature of marriage and its profoundly personal character evokes questions about spirituality and faith in action. Spirituality will be understood in its broadest sense as including the aspirations, frustrations, fears, dreams, and hopes of human persons in their quest for the Transcendent. This course will suggest that one of the most evident ways in which human persons come to discover God in their lives occurs in the marital union. Indeed, religious thought in the Old Testament has insisted that the relationship of husband and wife can be compared to the relationship between God and God's people and in the New Testament that the relationship of husband and wife can be compared to the relationship between Christ and His Church. This value will be demonstrated in many ways; here are a few examples:

1. Students will discover the insight of the prophet Hosea who, in his experience of a faithless wife, comes to the realization that the fidelity of God towards his people reflects his own faithfulness for his adulterous wife.

2. Students will examine the insight of Ephesians 5, where the writer first begins with the patriarchal idea of wives being subject to their husband, but then nudges that view with a triple injunction for husbands loving their wives, and providing the rationale for this command to the relationship between husband and wife as modeling the relationship of Christ and His Church.

3. Students will demonstrate an understanding of diverse fields of intellectual thought regarding the principles, goals, and virtues associated with marriage justice, love, freedom, equality, and human dignity genuine examples of faith in action.

## Learning Activities:

### **Possible array of texts:**

- Peck, M.D., M. Scott. *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth*. New Jersey: Simon and Schuster
- Scott, Kieran & Warren, Michael (eds.). *Perspectives on Marriage: a Reader* (Second Edition). New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Honors credit students only: Spong, John Shelby. *Living in Sin?: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality*. New York: HarperCollins, 1988. All three books are available in paperback.

Note: (Instructors may vary the textbooks.)

### **Possible evaluation methods:**

- Lecture
- Discussion
- Readings
- Examinations
- Papers

Note: (Instructors may vary the evaluation categories.)

### **Sample Semester Schedule:**

Week 1:	Introduction
Week 2:	History (Old Testament Era)
Week 3:	History (New Testament Era)
Week 4:	History (New Testament Era)
Week 5:	History (Patristic Era)
Week 6:	History (Medieval Era)
Week 7:	History (Reformation Era)
Week 8:	Marriage as a Journey or Passage; Kubler-Ross
Week 9:	Erikson; Spirituality of Marriage; Paschal Mystery
Week 10:	Peck (Discipline)
Week 11:	Peck (Discipline; Love)
Week 12:	Peck (Love)
Week 13:	Ends of Marriage in the 20 <sup>th</sup> Century

Week 14: Humanae Vitae: Birth Control

Week 15: Conclusion B Peck (Grace); Myth of Orestes

Note: (Instructors may vary the presentation of topics to some degree, but the material covered will remain the same.)