The Role of the Church in Sex and Marriage in Medieval England

The Purpose of Marriage

The church typically prescribed marriages and sexual relations to safeguard the authorities of heads of families and their interest in preserving the integrity of the familial inheritance or patrimony.

A Woman’s Place

As highlighted in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, the church only allowed women to be a virgin who serves the Lord or a wife who raises a family. Kempe, however, pushed back at this notion by becoming a servant of God and a married mother. She insisted on the value of such a lifestyle by telling her own story, producing the first autobiography in English.

The Church’s Authority

The Wife of Bath from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* emphasizes the expectations for marriage that the church instilled within all people: marriage comes with a sexual debt that must be fulfilled to prevent adultery.

Marriage Debt

Medieval Feminism
ENGL 361