WOMEN, FEMINISM AND RELIGION IN EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT ENGLAND

Illuminating a formative period in the debate over sexual difference, this book contributes to our understanding of the origins of feminist thought. In late seventeenth-century England, female writers from diverse religious and political traditions confronted the question of women’s subordination. Their feminist protests disturbed even those who championed women’s education and defended female virtue. Some of these women, including Lady Mary Chudleigh and the Tory feminist Mary Astell, have attracted interest for their literary achievements and philosophical originality. This book approaches them from a new perspective, arguing that the primary impulse for their feminism was religious reformism: manifest in personal devotion, serious theological reflection and a vision for moral renewal and social justice. This reforming feminism, Sarah Apetrei argues, links Astell to the assertive women of dissenting and spiritualist traditions. Far from being a constraining influence on feminism, religion was a stimulus to new thinking about the status of women.

Sarah Apetrei is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Faculty of Theology, Keble College, University of Oxford.
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WOMEN, FEMINISM 
AND RELIGION IN 
EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT 
ENGLAND

SARAH APETREI

Keble College,
University of Oxford
To Marius,
and my parents
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