

OXFORD READINGS



IN FEMINISM

FEMINISM & THEOLOGY

Janet Martin Soskice
and **Diana Lipton**

OXFORD READINGS IN FEMINISM

Feminism and Theology

Edited by

Janet Martin Soskice

and

Diana Lipton

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FEMINISM AND THEOLOGY

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During the preparation of this volume Teresa Brennan, co-editor with Susan James of the series, was the victim of a hit-and-run driver. Teresa was especially keen to have a volume on theology in the series and was helpful and generous in her oversight of its production. Her Catholic faith was increasingly important to her in recent years, although never unproblematic. She will be much missed. Requiescat in Pace.

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General Introduction

Janet Martin Soskice

This collection has been assembled with two readerships especially in mind: first, those with a prior interest in theology and in feminist theology and, second, those interested in feminism who, seeing a book in this series on *Feminism and Theology*, may wish to pause to make themselves better acquainted. Since we have presumed little previous acquaintance with the literature, this collection can serve as an introduction for those in search of one; we hope, though, that even veterans in the field will find something new here.

WHY SHOULD THEOLOGY MATTER TO FEMINISTS?

European feminists know little of his [Jesus'] life. They hope to be done with these religious traditions without having gauged their impact on the societies in which they live . . . an ingenuous error . . . (Luce Irigaray)¹

It is no secret that some feminists regard the term 'feminist theology' as an oxymoron. Moreover, the two religions addressed in this volume, Judaism and Christianity, are often cast as prime villains in the Western history of the subordination and oppression of women. Their ideologies, their symbolism, and, above all, their established institutions stand accused of putting a stranglehold on women's aspirations. Asked recently whether feminism had 'succeeded' in the decades since the 1960s, Gloria Steinem replied that it would take more than forty years to overcome 5,000 years of 'racism, sexism, nationalism and *monotheism*'!²

We need not look far for apparent confirmation. Here is Scottish theologian John Knox in his evocatively named tract of 1588, 'The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women':