Philo’s Perception of Women

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PREFACE

By interpreting the Scripture of the Jews in terms of the Platonic tradition of his day Philo of Alexandria made a profound contribution to the religious consciousness of the West. His depiction of the journey of the soul became a model of the internalization of religion. It was a great accomplishment.

The present study is not intended to detract from Philo’s deserved reputation. Rather it aims to increase our understanding of his world of thought. It rises from the observation that Philo’s writing is based on an unquestioned assumption of female inferiority. Today, when women’s place in the history of thought draws increasing attention, it is natural that we should try to make sense of that assumption.

This work appeared in its original form as a doctoral dissertation at McMaster University. I should like to acknowledge the support of the members of my doctoral committee. Professor Alan Mendelson directed my studies on Philo and gave meticulous care to my manuscript. I am honoured that mine will be a sister volume to his work on Philo’s Jewish Identity. Professor Ed Sanders returned over and over from his position as Dean Ireland’s Professor at Oxford in order to see his last McMaster students through their work. His musings initiated the project and continued to give it momentum to the end. Professor George Paul of the Classics Department of McMaster gave me many a bibliographical lead, and was unstintingly generous with his time and advice. I thank them all most heartily.

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Like many women of my generation, I have led a compartmentalized life. Twenty years of homemaking and teaching elapsed between my undergrad and graduate studies. All the disrup-
tions of my return to university, including a move of 1200 miles, were encouraged and supported by my husband, Douglas, and our family: Gordon and his wife Janine, Gregory, Monty, Kenneth, and Marnie. This book is for them.