

# Concerning Women's Ordination: Women's Ministry in the New Testament (Office)



In previous essays in this series, I have addressed theological objections to the ordination of women, both Protestant and Catholic. In the next few essays, I will discuss the actual ministry of women in the New Testament, that is: What actual ministerial roles did women exercise during the New Testament period, and what might be the implications for current ecclesial practice? I will address three issues: (1) Did women exercise ministerial office in the New Testament period? (2) How does the New Testament address the question of female bishops or presbyters? (3) What are the contemporary hermeneutical implications of what the New Testament says about women in office? That is, what should be the church's current practice in light of New Testament material concerning women in office? (Previous essays have already discussed the status of women in the Old Testament, women in the ministry of Jesus, women and Old Testament priesthood, and the theological implications of Jesus having called only male apostles.) In this essay, I will address the first question: Did women exercise ministerial office in the New Testament period?

## **New Testament Office**

Roman Catholic theologian Francis Martin brings a helpful

contribution to the discussion of the ministry of women in the New Testament by distinguishing between (1) charisms of service, (2) ministry, and (3) office. A charism of service is a particular endowment, given by the Holy Spirit, that enables a member of the Christian community to contribute to the life of that community. Examples of charisms of service would be prophecy, teaching, words of wisdom or knowledge, speaking, interpretation of tongues, helping others (1 Cor. 12:4-11,28, 14; 1 Peter 4:11). Ministry refers to divinely enabled activities that build up the Christian community and have a more permanent basis. More permanent ministerial gifts would include leadership, some forms of diaconal service, or itinerant preaching (Rom. 12:7-8; 1 Cor. 12:28). Office refers to a stable ministry which secures the permanence of apostolic teaching by providing for a continuing existence over space and time. Office works within the corporeal and historical nature of the church, and must be transmitted through some form of human activity (laying on of hands?). Office is particularly bound up with "remembering" the apostolic message, particularly the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The ministerial gifts that enable a person to exercise office include presiding over the faithful transmission of the gospel through word and sacrament in worship. Office is particularly associated with the ministry of presbyters and bishops.<sup>1</sup>

This is precisely the distinction that needs to be made to address the issue of women's ministry and the ordination of women in the church. No one denies (not even Protestant complementarians) that women exercised what Martin calls "charisms of service" in the New Testament church and, presumably, may do so today as well. No one denies that women exercised some forms of more permanent ministry in the New Testament church, and may do so today – what we might today designate as "lay ministries" – although Protestant complementarians and Catholic sacramentalists disagree about what kind of permanent ministries might be allowed to women

today. For Protestant complementarians, any permanent ministry involving the exercise of authority over or teaching of men would be excluded to women. For Catholic sacramentalists, women are allowed to exercise permanent ministries involving teaching and even the exercise of authority provided that they do not preside over the church's celebration of the sacraments. For both Protestant complementarians and Catholic sacramentalists, the prohibition lies in the exercise of office; they disagree in their understanding of ordination to office to involve different tasks – whether authority and teaching or celebration of the sacraments.

Given the clear distinction between charisms of service and more permanent ongoing ministries, the crucial difference for the current discussion concerns that between more permanent ministries and “office.” Given that some women in the New Testament period exercised more permanent forms of ministry, were any of these positions of office? The question is not as straightforward as it might appear for the following reasons:

First, during the New Testament period, the distinction between charism, ministry, and office, is not always clear. Martin writes: “There was a period when the charisms, ministries and offices . . . were not differentiated, though they clearly existed and achieved differentiation and identifiability as the church grew.”<sup>2</sup> Prophecy, for example, can be a charism of service, since Paul encourages all to “prophecy” (1 Cor. 15:5-19); when the church comes together, each is to have a “teaching” or “revelation” (1 Cor. 14:26). In distinction, other examples of prophecy seem to imply a kind of ongoing ministry (1 Cor. 14:32, 37; Rom. 12:8; Acts 11:27-28; 15:27-33; 21:9). Finally, “prophet” can also refer to someone who holds an office, that is, exercises some kind of supervisory role in the community (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). Similarly, “teaching” may refer to a transient charismatic gift (1 Cor. 12:8, 14:26), but it also can refer

to a more stable permanent ministry (Rom. 12:7; Col. 3:16). In most cases, however, teaching refers to an authoritative function of the transmission of the gospel, an "office." In the book of Acts, "teaching" is the task of apostles (Acts 2:42; 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28; 5:42; 13:1, 15:35; 18:11; 20:20; 21:21, 28; 28:31). In the pastoral epistles, the term applies to Paul as an apostle (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim.1:11). In Ephesians 4:11, "teacher" is listed as an office alongside apostle, prophet, evangelist, and shepherd. In a given case, then, it may not be clear whether the description of a particular task or title refers to a charism, a permanent ministry, or an "office."

How then to distinguish between ministry and office? Martin acknowledges: "It is obvious that we are not going to find the reality of office existing in a clearly distinct form in the New Testament" – first, because of "fluidity of language" (the same term can be used in more than one way), and second, because many of the charisms and ministries of the New Testament church were later absorbed by office.<sup>3</sup> Martin suggests two indications of the development of office in the New Testament. First is the assurance with which some New Testament figures teach or exercise authority. The apostle Paul would be a prime example. Second would be the exercise of leadership roles. In Acts, Luke refers to "elders" (presbyters) and "overseers" (bishops). Paul's letters refer to "elders," and "overseers" as well as "deacons." In 1 Thess. 5:12, Paul refers to those who "labor among you" and are "over you in the Lord." The book of Hebrews refers to "leaders" who preach the word and "keep watch over your souls" (Heb. 13:7, 17). At the same time, Martin acknowledges that New Testament terminology for office – apostle, overseer, leader, deacon, prophet, teacher, care-taker, laborer – is fluid and unfixed.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the New Testament simply does not address some of the characteristics essential to Martin's definition of office. The New Testament says nothing about who presided at the

celebration of the Lord's Supper/Eucharist in the first century church or how the eucharistic service was structured. Concern for faithful historical transmission of the gospel through a formal activity of the church – in the specific manner of second century and historic Catholic discussions of apostolic succession – is not addressed in the New Testament because, when the New Testament documents were written, the apostles were still alive.

Finally, except for individuals identified specifically as apostles (either the original twelve, Paul, James the brother of Jesus) or the rare exceptions such as Timothy and Titus, who are assigned specific pastoral responsibilities (1 Tim. 1:3, 4:11-16, 5:1-25, 6:2,17-20; 2 Tim. 1:6, 14. 2:2, 14ff., 4:1-4; Titus 1:5-9, 2:1-10,15, 3:1-2:10), the New Testament does not unequivocally identify specific individuals as exercising the task of what Martin calls "office." For example, opponents of women's ordination sometimes object that the New Testament nowhere identifies any woman by name as a bishop/overseer or presbyter/elder. However, apart from a single reference in 1 Peter 2:25 to Christ as the "bishop/overseer" of your souls, the New Testament nowhere identifies any man by name with these titles either. Rather the terms are generally applied to groups, and never to specifically named individuals: presbyters/elders (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22,23, 21:18; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:17,19; Tit. 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1,5; 2 John 1:1, 3 John 1:2), bishops/overseers (Acts 20:28; Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1,2; Tit. 1:7).<sup>5</sup>

These ambiguities are precisely the problem with Martin's concluding statement concerning the exercise of office by women in the New Testament: "The fact that even at the earliest level, when women were rightfully prominent and influential because of their gifts and services, there is no clear evidence that a woman was ever an office holder, is not an accident of the data, nor a patriarchal reading of it."<sup>6</sup>

Given the acknowledged fluidity and ambiguity of the language applied to ministry and office in the New Testament, and, given that, with the exceptions of the apostles as well as Timothy and Titus – to whom roles of “office” are specifically assigned – there is “no clear evidence” that specific men were named as office holders either, the strong conclusion that Martin draws from the evidence concerning women holding office is not warranted.

### **Women Office Holders in the New Testament**

Given the above ambiguities, any case that there were women office holders in the New Testament would have to be implied. Nonetheless, a careful examination of the evidence indicates that a strong case can be made that Paul’s letter to the Romans mentions three women who not only exercised what Martin calls permanent ministries, but also exercised ministries of church office.

Light can be shed on what Paul says about women in ministry by first looking at what he writes about ministry in general. Although Paul is clear that all members of the church have been given gifts of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor. 12:7), Paul also acknowledges authority figures in the congregation. In Galatians 6:6, he speaks of local teachers. In 1 Cor. 12:28, he seems to indicate a hierarchical order: (1) apostles, (2) prophets, (3) teachers, (4) miracles workers and other charismatic gifts. Ben Witherington points to the following specific ministries in Paul’s writings: leader, administrator, or overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; Phil. 1:1); *diakonos*(διάκονος)(Phil. 1:1); fellow-worker (*synergos*, συνεργός). The leadership pattern in Paul’s churches is that of (1) apostles; (2) Paul’s “fellow-workers” – traveling companions who had authority over and were involved in several congregations; (3) local leaders. Those with greater financial resources could provide meeting places, patronage, protection, and lodging, which could lead to a kind of church leadership. At the same time, Paul’s approach to

leadership was neither based on traditional social distinctions, nor, on the other hand, was it merely pragmatic or democratic. Paul's primary criteria for leadership was that of service in building up the body of Christ. In this way, although Paul did not abolish social distinctions, he used them for the benefit of the church, and thus turned normal social categories upside down.<sup>7</sup> (We have already seen this principle in discussions in previous essays concerning "Christological subversion," "cruciformity," and "mutual submission").

In Romans 16, Paul concludes his letter with a series of greetings that reads something like a letter of recommendation. This would not have been unusual, since there were no methods of modern communication in the ancient world, and letters of recommendation were vital. People would often send letters along with travelers they knew, and in this case, Paul recommends Phoebe, who was likely the carrier of his letter, whom Paul commends to the church in Rome (Rom. 16:1).<sup>8</sup> Paul names twenty-six people in the letter, the majority of whom seem to be Jewish Christians in Rome. The letter is addressed to the Gentile majority, however, whom Paul is encouraging to welcome these Jewish Christians and include them in fellowship. Paul does not directly greet his friends, co-workers and relatives whom he mentions in the list. Rather, by asking his Gentile audience to do it for him, Paul is likely hoping to effect some kind of reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most interesting characteristics of the list is the large number of women Paul mentions. Out of twenty-six persons mentioned, ten (including Phoebe, the letter-carrier), are women. In the list, Paul describes women as "deacons," "patrons" or "leaders," "apostles," "co-workers," "hard workers." As James Dunn notes, "So far as this list is concerned, Paul attributes leading roles to more women than

men in the churches addressed.”<sup>10</sup>

## A Woman Deacon

Paul opens his series of greetings by introducing Phoebe, his letter carrier, to the church at Rome. The following is my own extremely literal translation: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon (οὐσαν διάκονον, *ousan diakonon*) of the church in Cenchrea, so that you may receive her in the Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever thing she may need, for indeed, she has been a patron/leader (προστάτις, *prostatis*) of many and of myself.” (Romans 16:1).

English translations from the mid-twentieth century are misleading.<sup>11</sup> Translation of the key words *diakonos* and *prostatis* is more revealing of translator assumptions about women’s roles than illuminating of the passage’s meaning. The original NIV translates the passage to describe Phoebe as a “servant,” and requests Paul’s readers “to give her any help . . . for she has been a great help to many people . . .” The older RSV identifies Phoebe as a “deaconess,” but also translates *prostatis* as “helper.” The more recent ESV translates *diakonos* as “servant,” but includes “deaconess” in a footnote. ESV more correctly translates *prostatis* as “patron.” The more recent revised NIV and the NRSV recognize Phoebe as a “deacon,” but translate *prostatis* as “benefactor,” which is softer than “patron.”

It is correct that *diakonos* can be translated as “servant.”<sup>12</sup> In Romans 13:4, the civil ruler is described as the “servant” (*diakonos*) of God. In the story of the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus tells the “servants” (*diakonoi*) to fill the jars with water – which becomes wine (John 2:5,7, 9). In Romans 15:8, Christ is described as a *diakonos* (servant or minister) to the Jewish people. Whether *diakonos* should be translated “servant” or as referring to a church office depends on context and exegesis. This is an exact parallel with the Greek word



*presbyteros* (πρεσβύτερος), which is translated variously. In the book of Acts, *presbyteroi* sometimes refers to Jewish leaders (Acts 4:5, 8, 23: 6:12), in which case it is translated “elders,” and sometimes refers to church office (11:30, 14:23; 15:2,4,6,23, etc.), and, while often translated “elders,” could also be transliterated as “presbyters.” In the pastoral epistles, *presbyteros* generally refers to those holding church office (1 Timothy 4:14; 5:17,19; Titus 1:5), but can also refer literally to older men (1 Tim. 5:1), and even (with a feminine ending) to older women (1 Tim. 5:2).

There are several reasons why *diakonos* should be translated as “deacon” rather than “servant” in Romans 16:1, and should be understood as referring to an office. The noun *diakonos* is masculine in gender (not the expected feminine), and if Paul had meant “servant,” he would likely have used a verbal form such as “one who serves” (διακονέω, *diakoneo*) (Romans 15:25) or the general term “ministry” (διακονία, *diakonia*) (1 Cor. 16:15). The participle *ousan* (οὔσαν διάκονον, *ousan diakonon*, “being a deacon”) would seem to refer to an ongoing ministry. This, combined with the qualifier, “of the church in Cenchrae,” points to a recognized office in the church. The appropriate context for understanding the term should then be the parallels of Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8,12. Phoebe should not be called a “deaconess” because the gender of the noun is masculine, and “deaconess” was an office of women church workers that did not exist for another three hundred years.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, as Dunn notes, “Phoebe is the first recorded ‘deacon’ in the history of Christianity.”<sup>14</sup> (Romans 16:1 and possibly 1 Timothy 3:1 are the only two places women are given the title διάκονος in the NT.<sup>15</sup>) N.T. Wright points out that attempts to make the term mean anything else than “deacon” fail. To translate the word as “servant,” merely pushes the problem back a further stage, “since that would either mean that Phoebe was a paid employee of the church (to do what?) or that there was an order of ministry, otherwise, unknown,

called ‘servants.’”<sup>16</sup> As Craig Keener, points out, “Most readers would probably assume that meaning [deacon] here if this passage did not refer to a woman and if it were translated the way it normally is in the New Testament.”<sup>17</sup>

At the same time that Paul’s greetings in Romans indicate that Phoebe was a deacon, the New Testament says little about what the office of deacon entailed. Many Christian churches understand the office of deacon in terms of the seven overseers of tables described in Acts 6; however, the title of *diakonos* is not applied to them, even though the work of both the apostles and the seven is described in terms of service or ministry (*διακονία*, *diakonia*) (Acts 6:1,2,4).<sup>18</sup> Keener notes that the term generally means a “minister of the word.” Paul applies the term to himself as an apostle of the gospel (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25), and also uses it for colleagues in the gospel (Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:7; 1 Thess. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6).<sup>19</sup> Dunn suggests that it “points more to a recognized ministry . . . or position of responsibility within the congregation,” and that the office was “likely a ministry of hospitality.”<sup>20</sup>

The second key word used to describe Phoebe is *προστάτις* (*prostatis*). Against translations of the word as “helper,” Dunn insists that the word should be given its “full weight,” and that it means “patron,” “protector,” or, alternatively, “leader” or “ruler.” The masculine equivalent of *prostatis* is well known as the role of a wealthy or influential individual as patron. The Latin equivalent is *patronis*. There is a Jewish synagogue inscription from Aphrodisias in the third century of a woman *προστάτις* of a synagogue.<sup>21</sup>

Other New Testament scholars suggest a meaning of “patron” or “sponsor.”<sup>22</sup> In his earlier book, Witherington suggested that Phoebe was in charge of the charitable work of the church. The

term likely means “helper” or “protector,” referring to personal care or hospitality that Phoebe had provided to Paul and others.<sup>23</sup> In his commentary on Romans, Witherington suggests that *prostatis* refers to a person in charge of some kind of charitable work, which is consistent with being called a deacon. It may also mean helper, protector, a “perhaps even *patroness*.” Given that Paul had rejected patronage in Corinth, choosing to support himself by tent-making, his acceptance of it from Phoebe shows that he has great respect for and trust in her.<sup>24</sup> Wright points out that the word “benefactor” means much more than the older NIV translation of “she has been of great help”: “[B]enefactors and patrons were a vital part of the culture, and this makes Phoebe someone to be reckoned with socially and financially as well as simply a sister in the Lord and a leader – of whatever sort – in her local church.”<sup>25</sup>

Philip Payne focuses rather on the notion that *prostatis* should be understood as “leader,” “chief,” or “executive office”: “Every meaning of every word in the NT related to the word Paul has chosen to describe Phoebe as a “leader” (προστάτις) that could apply to Rom. 16:2 refers to leadership.” (cf. Rom. 12:8). Payne argues that the linguistic evidence strongly favors the normal meaning of the term *prostatis* as “leader.” “Since her leadership was in the church it would entail spiritual oversight.” Given what Paul teaches about mutual submission, it should not be surprising that Paul includes himself under Phoebe’s leadership.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Paul’s readers would have regarded Phoebe as a woman of significance who had used her wealth and influence not only as a leader of the church in Cenchrae, but as Paul’s patron and benefactor. Dunn suggests that the terms *diakonis* and *prostatis* may be linked. Phoebe was a “deacon” of the church because of her well-known patronage of foreign visitors, resident Jews and visiting Christians. Paul recognized himself as the beneficiary of both Phoebe’s patronage and his

protection. Phoebe was a woman of “some stature,” a patron or protector of many, including Paul. She was a deacon and must have used her property and influence in the service of Christians in Cenchrae. She was traveling to Rome on business, and Paul took the opportunity of her travel to write the letter, and send it along with the commendation attached.<sup>27</sup>

### **A Woman Co-Worker and Teacher**

The first people Paul asks to be greeted in Romans 16 are Prisca and Aquila: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers (συνεργούς μου, *synergous mou*) in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles, give thanks.” (Rom. 16:3-4, my translation). Both Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila and Andronicus and Junia (mentioned later) seem to have been husband and wife “ministry teams.” There were places in the Greco-Roman world where only men or women could go, and a couple who ministered together could go places where one or the other could not go alone.<sup>28</sup> From 1 Cor. 16:19 and Acts 18, it appears that they were some of Paul’s closest co-workers, and “two of the most important people in Paul’s missionary enterprise.”<sup>29</sup> They seem to have been involved in a variety of activities, including providing hospitality for Paul, church planting, teaching and preaching. They were involved in a variety of churches, including Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. According to Acts 18:2, they came to Corinth after the Jews were expelled from Rome. Paul lived with them in Corinth, and they worked together because they shared the same trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3). They traveled with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). and stayed there for some time (1 Cor. 16:19). When Paul wrote his letter, they were now back in Rome. 2 Timothy 4:19 later places them again in Ephesus.<sup>30</sup> They were likely well-to-do business people who could travel extensively. That they risked their necks for Paul may imply that they attempted to use their social status to protect him.

That “all the churches of the Gentiles” are grateful suggests sponsorship, missionary leadership, or teaching.<sup>31</sup> They seem to have regularly used their home as a meeting place for believers. Verse 5 refers to an assembly of Christians who meet in the home of Priscilla and Aquila. It would seem that Christian meetings were held in homes where the household owner or owners were Christians. Paul mentions other house churches in 1 Cor. 16:19 (Priscilla and Aquila again), Col. 4:15, and Philem 2.<sup>32</sup>

Paul always refers to Priscilla as “Prisca.” Luke adds the diminutive “Priscilla.”<sup>33</sup> Four of the six times, her name comes first, which is “highly unusual in a patriarchal culture.” That she is mentioned first may be explained either because she was of higher social status, or because she was more prominent in the church. Linda Belleville points out that when reference to their occupation as tent-makers or to “their house” is mentioned, Aquila’s name comes first, but when ministry is mentioned (including the teaching of Apollos), Priscilla’s name is first. This would suggest that Priscilla had the dominant ministry and leadership skills.<sup>34</sup>

Paul refers to Priscilla and Aquila as “my co-workers” or “fellow-workers” (*synergous mou*). Paul’s most frequent term to describe those who helped him in ministry is *synergos* (συνεργός), which he uses more frequently than terms such as apostle, brother, or servant. Paul uses it twelve of the thirteen times it occurs in the NT (cf. 3 John 8), and it is never used simply to refer to ordinary Christians (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9, 16:16; 2 Cor. 1:24, 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:2; Philem. 24). A “co-worker” is an associate of Paul who works together with him as commissioned by God in the shared work of mission preaching. In 1 Cor. 16:16, 18, the Corinthians are asked to submit themselves to all who are *synergounti* and *kopionti* (those who are “fellow-workers” and “laborers”), so the term implies a leadership position.<sup>35</sup> In

Phil. 4:2-3, Paul describes two women (Euodias and Synteches) as “fellow-workers” who “struggled together with me in the gospel.” They are ranked alongside Clement (a man), and alongside Paul’s other “fellow-worker.” They are not simply devout women, then, but fellow ministers of the gospel. Witherington notes, “Paul certainly shows no qualms about having women as co-workers in a wide variety of roles.”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to being designated as “co-workers,” Priscilla and Aquila were teachers. Acts 18:1-3, 24-26 speaks of Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos. By mentioning her first, Luke implies that Priscilla is the primary instructor. “More accurately” means that Priscilla went beyond basic Christian teaching. Apollos already had a basic knowledge of Christian faith, and was “well versed” in Scripture. That the act took place in private is “probably not very significant . . . since there is no indication that Luke was trying to avoid having Priscilla teach Apollos in a worship context.”<sup>37</sup> That Priscilla was present in Ephesus at the time the pastoral epistles were written (2 Tim. 4:19) is significant in light of the complementarian appeal to the prohibition of women teaching men in 1 Timothy 2:12. The passage cannot mean a permanent prohibition of women teaching men because Priscilla taught Apollos.<sup>38</sup>

## **A Woman Apostle**

Certainly the most controversial among Paul’s greetings in Romans 16 is verse 7: “Greet Andronicus and Junia (Ἰουνίαν, *Iounian*), my relatives (τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου, *tous suggeneis mou*) and fellow-prisoners, who are well-known among the apostles (οἵτινές εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις, *oitines eisin episēmoi ēn tois apostolois*), and who were in Christ before me.” (Rom. 16:7, my translation). Similar to Prisca and Aquila, Andronicus and Junia appear to be another husband-wife ministry team. Despite their non-Jewish names, they were certainly Jewish and perhaps even close relatives of Paul,

since Paul identifies them as “relatives” (τοὺς συγγενεῖς μου, *tous suggeneis mou* = “my relatives,” “kinsfolk”). They had been in prison with Paul, and, since they were “in Christ” before Paul, they were Christians from an early date. They are a man and a woman, either husband and wife, or possibly brother and sister. Described by Paul as “apostles,” they would have been witnesses to the resurrection (1 Cor. 9:1), who had a calling or commission to preach the gospel.<sup>39</sup>

The earliest patristic texts and translations of the Greek presuppose that the passage should be translated as I have done so here. That is, Junia is identified as a woman who is also a well-known apostle. Despite demeaning comments he had made elsewhere concerning women,<sup>40</sup> John Chrysostom spoke highly of Junia: “To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles . . . Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.”<sup>41</sup> Commentators from the patristic era onward took Paul to mean that Andronicus and Junia were apostles. The Greek fathers were unanimous in understanding Junia to be a female apostle.<sup>42</sup> The Latin fathers, as well as Latin translations, were also unanimous in recognizing that Junia was a woman who was notable among the apostles.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Latin Vulgate reads: “*Salutate Andronicum et Iuniam . . . qui sunt nobiles in apostolis.*” Early English translations, such as the King James Version, also follow this pattern: “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”

Two exceptions have been claimed to this universal patristic consensus. Origen, in Rufinus’s Latin translation of his commentary on Romans, refers to Junias (not Junia), as does Epiphanius (315-403).<sup>44</sup> In both cases, however, the claim is problematic. The passage in Origen occurs in Rufinus’s later

Latin translation (not Origen's original Greek text, which no longer exists), and recent critical editions indicate a transcriptional error. "Junias" is a variant in two of three twelfth-century manuscripts, but earlier manuscripts have "Junia." Eldon Jay Epp concludes: "In any event, this alleged exception can be dismissed as carrying little if any weight, and we can be confident that Origen read Rom 16:7 as 'Junia. . . [T]here can be no doubt that feminine forms were used by Origen in these passages.'"<sup>45</sup>

The reference in Epiphanius is also irrelevant. Epiphanius wrote that Junias was a man and a bishop, but that the unquestionably female Prisca was a male bishop as well! Moreover, it is unlikely that Epiphanius was actually the author of the cited text. The work was not ascribed to Epiphanius until the ninth century, and in only one existing thirteenth-century manuscript (out of nine). The others do not ascribe it to Epiphanius.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the unanimous consensus during the first millennium of Christianity, the patristic reading passed by the wayside. Two key questions were fundamental in the shift: First, is apostleship restricted by sexual identity? Second, are the two individuals well-known apostles, or merely known to the apostles? The key assumption behind the challenge lies in the assumption that a woman cannot be an apostle. Epp points to an interesting pattern. If the two individuals are identified as apostles, then *Iounian* becomes a man. However, if Junia is instead identified as a woman, then (because a woman could not be an apostle), the ending phrase is translated "well known to the apostles": "[I]t is interesting to observe that, over time, the male 'Junias' and the female 'Junia' each has his or her alternating 'dance partners' . . ."<sup>47</sup>

The pattern appears in some recent discussions of the passage. Roman Catholic theologian Manfred Hauke acknowledged that Andronicus and Junia are "numbered among the 'apostles' here."



He was quick to point out, however, that the accusative *Iounian* can derive as well from the masculine *Iounianos* (Junianus) as from the female *Iounia* (Junia). However, women cannot be apostles: “The strict ‘bans on teaching’ in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 would not be easy to understand given the supposed existence of a female missionary preacher.”<sup>48</sup> And so, Hauke concludes: “An ‘apostle Junia’ thus seems to fall into the category of modern myth . . . .”<sup>49</sup>

Similarly, Evangelical complementarian Wayne Grudem claims that, in Greek, “this name could be either masculine or feminine,” and he appeals to modern translations that identify it as masculine. Grudem eventually acknowledges that the name is probably feminine, but concludes that any reading that Junia is a female apostle “carries little weight against the clear teaching of exclusive male eldership and male apostleship in the rest of the New Testament.”<sup>50</sup> The Anglican *Forward in Faith* document *Consecrated Women?* claims that “we cannot be sure” whether Junia was a man or a woman because “*Iounian* could be the accusative of the masculine noun or it could be that of the feminine *Iounia*.” However, they also embrace the predicted pattern: “[T]hose who claim Junia as the first woman apostle stand on shaky ground. The disputed interpretation of one verse in one letter of St Paul can hardly call into question the clear witness of the Pauline corpus taken in its entirety.”<sup>51</sup> The pattern is clear; if Junia is an apostle, then Junia must be Junias; if Junia is Junia, and not Junias, then she cannot be an apostle.

Given the unanimous patristic consensus, how did the female Junia become the male Junias? It was only in the Medieval period that scribes first introduced the form *Junias* – based on the conviction that a woman could not have been an apostle! Aegidius (or Giles) of Rome (ca 1243/47-1316) seems to have been the first to have identified Junia(s) as a male in the thirteenth century.<sup>52</sup> Luther’s translation of the Bible into

German also contributed to the view that Junia was not a woman, but a man named Junias.<sup>53</sup> Beginning in the early twentieth century, lexicographers began to turn the female Junia into the male Junias by changing the accent. In Greek, the only difference between the female Ἰουνία and the male Ἰουνιά is between the feminine acute and the masculine circumflex accents. In the earlier uncial texts, there were no accents, and when accents were eventually added, the first editions of the Greek New Testament printed the female acute rather than the male circumflex accent, e.g., Erasmus's Greek New Testament. The change from a feminine acute to a masculine circumflex first occurred in Nestle's Greek New Testament in 1927, followed by other editions of the Greek New Testament, with the rationale usually given that it would have been unlikely for a woman to be among the apostles.<sup>54</sup> Modern lexicons have assumed that the name is masculine without argument.<sup>55</sup> So Arndt and Gingerich state: "The possibility, fr. a purely lexical point of view, that this is a woman's name . . . is prob. ruled out by the context."<sup>56</sup> But the context says nothing that would indicate it is a man's name!

In modern translations, the shift to "Junias" began with the New Testament of the English Revised Version (1881) and the American Standard Version (1901). (Interestingly, Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament [1881] still had the female Ἰουνία.) The tendency toward masculine translations continued until around 1970. The RSV, for example, has "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men(!) of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."<sup>57</sup> Richard Bauckham comments: "The history of the matter is a sad story of prejudice making bad translation."<sup>58</sup> In summary, the understanding of *Iounian* as feminine dominated the first millennium of Christianity, but then was arbitrarily changed from female "Junia" to male "Junias" without discussion or justification.<sup>59</sup>

What would be the argument or justification for understanding *Iounian* to be either Junia or Junias, feminine or masculine? *Iunia* is a Latin name, not a Greek one. When translated into Greek, the accent (as noted above) is the only determiner of the gender of the name in Greek: 'Ιουνίαν (acute) or 'Ιουνιάων (circumflex). The argument for a masculine name is that *Iunias* would be a shortened form or contraction of *Iunianus*. The problem is that there is “no empirical evidence whatsoever for the abbreviated form *Iunias*.” There are no occurrences in any Greek or Latin document of the New Testament period, and no evidence that *Iunianus* has ever been shortened to *Iunias*.<sup>60</sup> Belleville also points out that Greek nicknames were shortened versions of longer names, but Latin nicknames were lengthened, not shortened. Also, when there was a final -i in the stem, it was omitted. The shortened form of Ιουνιανός would then be Ιουνᾶς (*Iounas*), not Ιουνιάς (*Iounias*). It was also not Paul’s habit to use nicknames. For example, he refers to Prisca, not Priscilla, and Silvanus, not Silas.<sup>61</sup>

What then, would be the case that *Iounian* is the accusative of the Latin female name Junia? In Roman society, women did not generally have a personal name, but were named after their family. For example, *Gaius Iulius Caesar* is masculine; his daughters were *Iulia Major* and *Iulia Minor* (Julia I and II), with “Iulius” being the *nomen* or family name. *Iunius* is a common Latin nomen; there are many men named “Iunius,” and consequently many women named “Iunia.” Latin names were transcribed into Greek with Latin masculine endings rendered as Greek names in -ος (-os), Latin feminine names in -α are rendered in -α (-a) or -η (ē). The names Iunius/Iunia would thus be *Iounios/Iounia*. The accusative would be *Iounion/Iounian*. Accordingly, *Iounian* would have to be a woman.<sup>62</sup>

Again, while there are examples of the male name “Iunius” and the female name “Iunia,” there is not a single example of the

male name "Iunias."<sup>63</sup> As Bauckham points out, the evidence of name usage is the "only argument." There would have to be "overwhelming reasons" to support a masculine reading over a feminine one, but given the wide prevalence of the name "Junia" and the complete lack of evidence for "Junias," the conclusion points to the female name: "We certainly cannot presuppose, as such overwhelming reasons, that there could not have been a woman apostle or that Paul would not have recognized a woman apostle. This would be to beg the question."<sup>64</sup> All the evidence points to Junia being a woman, and none whatsoever for the male "Junias." Consequently, in the last few decades, the majority of scholars have come to acknowledge that Junia was indeed a woman.

However, as noted above, there is a predictable pattern to the discussion. For much of twentieth century New Testament scholarship, it was assumed that, since *Iounian* was an apostle, and a woman could not be an apostle, then "Junias" had to be a man. With the new rising consensus, the shift has turned to the argument that the now-recognized female "Junia" could not have been an apostle. Michael R. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace made the case that, although Junia was indeed a woman, she was not an apostle. Rather, the Greek should be translated not as "outstanding among the apostles," but "well known to the apostles."<sup>65</sup> Burer's and Wallace's article is cited as definitively settling the issue by opponents of women's ordination.<sup>66</sup> The complementarian-leaning ESV translates the passage "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me." There is no footnote providing even a hint that "to the apostles" might be translated "among the apostles."

Two key distinctions are important for the discussion. Richard S. Cervin's essay (cited above), distinguishes between an "inclusive" meaning (noteworthy *among* the apostles), and an

“exclusive” meaning (noted *by* the apostles), and this distinction is followed by later writers.<sup>67</sup> The second crucial issue concerns how we understand the meaning of ἐν (*en*) plus the dative case. Paul wrote ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (*episēmoi en tois apostolois*). Burer and Wallace suggest that a noun in the genitive case is typically used with comparative adjectives; if Paul had meant that Andronicus and Junia were outstanding “among the apostles,” he would have used the genitive – τῶν ἀποστόλων (*tōn apostolōn*). If no comparison is suggested, however, he would have used *en* plus the dative – ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (*en tois apostolois*).<sup>68</sup>

After a comparative analysis of ancient texts, Burer and Wallace conclude that when a comparison is made, *epismos* is frequently put in the genitive case. So, in 3 Macc. 6:1, Eleazar was “prominent among the priests.”<sup>69</sup> Also key to their discussion is a distinction between personal and impersonal comparisons. They acknowledge that when used with impersonal nouns, *en* is used comparatively. In Add. Esth. 16:22, a “notable day” is to be observed “among the festivals.”<sup>70</sup> Crucial to their discussion is the pseudepigraphal Psalms of Solomon 2:6, which they translate as “they [the Jewish captives] were a spectacle among the Gentiles.” Burer and Wallace claim that this passage has “all the elements” for a comparison to Rom. 16:7: (a) people as the reference of the adjective “well known,” (b) followed by *en* plus the dative plural, (c) the dative plural refers to people. The first group is not part of the second; that is, the Jewish captives were not Gentiles. “That the parallels discovered conform to our working hypothesis at least gives warrant to seeing Andronicus’s and Junia’s *fame* as that which was among the apostles.” They claim: “[A]lthough the inclusive view is aided in some *impersonal* constructions that involve ἐν plus the dative, every instance of *personal* inclusiveness used a genitive rather than ἐν. On the other hand, every instance of ἐν plus *personal* nouns supported the exclusive view, with *Pss.*

Sol. 2.6 providing a very close parallel to Rom 16.7.”<sup>71</sup>

The two authors conclude by examining a number of papyri and ancient inscriptions. Although they acknowledge that the data is “not plentiful,” they do claim that it points in a single direction: “ἐπίσημος followed by ἐν plus personal datives does not connote membership within the group, but simply that one is known by the group.”<sup>72</sup> They conclude that Rom. 16:7 “almost certainly” should be translated “well known to the apostles.” Thus, Junia was known to the apostles, but she was not an apostle.<sup>73</sup> (Despite this strong claim, they acknowledge that the data is not conclusive; in one case Lucianus “unmistakably” has an inclusive force for ἐν (*en*) plus the dative.)<sup>74</sup>

Shortly after its appearance, three New Testament scholars (Richard Bauckham, Linda Belleville and Eldon Jay Epp), responded critically to Burer’s and Wallace’s essay.<sup>75</sup> Bauckham claims that “their evidence does not actually support [their] conclusion,” and that the essay has “serious defects”; its conclusion is “highly tendentious, even misleading.”<sup>76</sup> Belleville writes that their analysis is “problematic in a number of respects.”<sup>77</sup> Epp states that “even a cursory examination of [the evidence] presented raised significant doubts about the authors’ stated thesis . . .”<sup>78</sup> As noted above, Burer and Wallace claim that “some impersonal constructions” of *en* plus the dative point to an inclusive sense, while “every instance” of personal use plus the genitive is inclusive, and “every instance” of *en* plus the dative is exclusive. However, as Bauckham points out, in each case there is only one text given as an example for each category: (Add Esth 16:22 [impersonal inclusive]; 3 Macc 6:1 [personal + genitive]; Pss. Sol. 2:6 [personal + dative]). “One” does not equal “some,” and certainly not “every case.”<sup>79</sup>

Burer and Wallace make much of Pss. Sol. 2:6, which is their sole evidence of a “very close parallel” to Rom. 16:7. Bauckham and Belleville point out that, unfortunately, Burer and Wallace incompletely and inaccurately cite the passage in claiming that *epismō* refers to the Jewish captives. A complete citation makes clear that *epismō* does not refer to the captives at all! Bauckham cites a translation by Sebastian Brock: “Her sons and daughters were in grievous captivity, their neck bears a seal-ring, a mark (*epismō*) among the nations.”<sup>80</sup> Belleville translates the passage: “The sons and daughters (of Jerusalem) were in grievous captivity, their neck *with* a seal, *with* a slave-brand among the Gentiles.”<sup>81</sup> *Epismō* refers then not to “sons and daughters,” but to “seal” or “seal-ring.” Since the essential element (people used as a referent) is not present at all, the passage is irrelevant to the evidence.<sup>82</sup>

Both Bauckham and Epp also question the distinction Burer and Wallace make between personal and impersonal “inclusive” uses. The five impersonal uses provided by the authors are all inclusive, and three of them (Add. Esth. 16:22; 1 Macc. 11:37, 14:48) have *en* plus the dative.<sup>83</sup> Epp also points out that the single example of an inscription (TAM II west wall. Coll. 2.5) which they treat in detail is translated exclusively in a way that begs the question, since it could as easily be translated inclusively. Belleville argues that all of the Hellenistic inscriptions referred to by Burer and Wallace should actually be translated inclusively, and Epp agrees.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, Witherington points out that when patristic authors use “in” to mean “in the eyes of,” they actually include the specific words, or something like them. If Paul had meant “noted among the apostles,” he would not have used *en*, but rather *hypo* or a simple dative form.<sup>85</sup> Against Burer’s and Wallace’s central thesis, Belleville insists that “Primary

usage of ἐν and the plural dative (personal or otherwise) inside and outside the NT (with rare exception) is *inclusive* in/among and not *exclusive* 'to' . . . ." (She cites Matt. 2:6; Acts 4:34; 1 Peter 5:1 as examples.)<sup>86</sup> Belleville concludes: "Despite their assertions to the contrary, [Burer and Wallace] fail to offer one clear biblical or extra-biblical Hellenistic example of an 'exclusive' sense of ἐπίσημος ἐν and a plural noun to mean 'well known to.' The authors themselves admit this early on, but then go on to conclude otherwise."<sup>87</sup> Epp concludes that the three evaluations by Bauckham, Belleville, and himself "should put to rest any notion that [Rom. 16:7] carried the sense of 'well known to/esteemed by the apostles.' Again, it is clear that Andronicus and Junia, in Paul's description, were 'outstanding apostles.'"<sup>88</sup>

Finally, more significant than the detailed grammatical debates is the unanimous agreement among the patristic interpreters of Romans 16:7 that the text identifies Andronicus and Junia as "among the apostles." Bauckham writes that it is a "major error" to dismiss this evidence. Writers such as John Chrysostom and Origen were native educated Greek speakers: "If Burer and Wallace's conclusion is right, then it is inexplicable that these Greek patristic interpreters would have read the Greek of Romans in the way they did."<sup>89</sup>

There is one last escape for those who want to deny that Junia was a woman apostle. As with the case of "deacon," which can also mean "servant," the Greek word translated "apostle" can also mean "messenger"; in a manner similar to the way in which Phoebe was down-graded from a deacon to a "servant" of the church at Cenchrae, so there are those who insist that even if Junia was a woman and an "apostle," this does not mean that Junia held a church office. Grudem claims that "apostle" could just as well mean "messenger": "Since Andronicus and Junia(s) are otherwise unknown as apostles, even if someone wanted to translate 'well known *among*,' the sense 'well known among the



messengers' would be more appropriate."<sup>90</sup> While the ESV does not have a footnote offering "well known among the apostles" as an alternative reading, the footnote to "apostles" does read "or messengers."

The clue to how Paul is using the word "apostle" in this context is determined by how he uses it elsewhere. Paul would not have understood Andronica and Junia to be among the "twelve apostles," whom Paul refers to as "the twelve" (1 Cor. 15:5). Paul does use the word "apostle" in a non-technical sense twice (2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25) to refer to messengers of the church. In these cases, Paul qualifies "apostle(s)" by referring to "apostles of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23) or to "your apostle" (Phil. 2:25). Paul's unqualified use of "the apostles" would indicate that he is using "apostle" as he does when he refers to himself as an apostle, to refer to an office which is larger than the office of the twelve, but includes those (like himself) to whom the risen Christ had revealed himself in a resurrection appearance, and who had been commissioned to preach the gospel. Given the extent to which Paul defends his apostleship, it is "highly unlikely that he would employ the term 'apostle' loosely when applying it to others."<sup>91</sup> Given that Paul claims that Andronicus and Junia were Christians before he was, it is possible that they were among those whom Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 15:7 as witnesses of the resurrection.<sup>92</sup> If Andronicus and Junia were Christians before Paul, and "outstanding" among the apostles, they would likely have been members of the early Jerusalem church, and perhaps founders of the Christian community in Rome. Paul does not speak so highly of anyone else he mentions in Roman 16.<sup>93</sup>

## **Office Once More**

At the beginning of this essay, I referred to a distinction made by Roman Catholic theologian Francis Martin between charism, on-going ministry, and office in the New Testament

church. While acknowledging that women exercised ministries of both charism and on-going ministry in the New Testament period, Martin denied that there is any evidence that women ever held church office. In this essay, I have examined the apostle Paul's references to three women who exercised church ministry in connection to the church in Rome and have tried to make the case that all three exercised some form of church office. Phoebe was both a deacon of the church at Cenchrae and a *prostatis*, a patron of Paul's ministry who exercised some form of church leadership. Priscilla was a "co-worker" of Paul, the term that Paul applies to his closest associates, but also exercised the ministry of a teacher. Finally, Junia was an apostle, a witness to the risen Christ who exercised a ministry of gospel proclamation.

Granted that these women exercised some form of ongoing ministries in the early church, does it follow that these ministries were necessarily examples of church office? Martin claims otherwise. Concerning Phoebe he writes: "Thus the fact that Phoebe is called a *diakonos* . . . probably means that she is traveling as a representative of her community. . . . Although her influence was great and beneficial, there is no indication that she fulfilled what would later be recognized as an office."<sup>94</sup>

As with Phoebe, Martin denies that there is any reason to suggest that the teaching ministry of either Priscilla or Aquila(!) implies any kind of office:

*Given this usage of the term and the fluidity of vocabulary we have already seen, it is possible to say of Prisca (Priscilla) that she, along with her husband, was an outstanding proponent of the gospel, whose authority came from the grace of ministry she received, but not that she held some "official" position in the church at large. . . . [W]e see the prominence and influence of a ministry divinely conferred upon both a woman and a man. They are not, however,*

*presented in a way that would lead one to classify either of them along with the “teachers” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:1, where the term implies office.*<sup>95</sup>

Martin makes a similar claim concerning Junia:

*I would conclude . . . that there are strict and loose senses of the term apostle. . . . [Paul] uses apostolos in both a strict and a loose sense. . . . [C]alling Andronicus and Junia “apostles” in Romans 16:7 may approximate the use in 2 Corinthians 8:23, but it is far from the strong sense implied in Paul’s self-designation or in lists such as 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.*<sup>96</sup>

Concerning the term “co-worker,” applied to Priscilla, he writes: “[Co-workers] seems to be a title [Paul] reserves for those who have generously extended themselves for the sake of the gospel, but nothing more precise can be garnered from it.” Martin suggests that those who would conclude from the application of terms such as “co-worker” (or presumably “deacon” or “apostle”) to women such as Phoebe that they should be equated to “co-workers” such as Timothy and other leaders (1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 16:16) are reading the texts too narrowly: “Such a way of reasoning implies a rigidity of terminology foreign to the New Testament in general and Paul in particular.” Martin concludes that while these women had great ministerial gifts, “[t]here is, however, no address to a woman or quality attributed to a woman that would suggest that their leadership was of the type I have described as *office*.”<sup>97</sup>

Martin’s demurral is based on the fluidity of vocabulary concerning ministry in the New Testament. Prophecy and teaching can be examples of either charism, on-going ministry, or office. Moreover, we could add that the New Testament terms associated with office are simply ordinary descriptive labels

that can have more than one meaning. A *diakonos* could be a “deacon,” but might only be a “servant.” A *presbyteros* could be a “presbyter,” but might just be an “older man.” An *episkopos* could be a “bishop,” but might only be an “overseer.” An *apostolos* could be an “apostle,” but might only be a “messenger.” A “co-worker” might be an office holder (such as Timothy), but might just be one of Paul’s traveling companions.

At the same time, granted the possible flexibility of vocabulary, it will not do simply to assume without argument that the same language applied to both men and women implies office in reference to men, but only “flexible vocabulary,” and not office, to women. To claim on the one hand, as Martin does, that no women are addressed or exercised leadership in such a manner as to imply that their ministry was a form of office, and then, on that basis to conclude that Paul’s applications of titles such as “deacon,” “co-worker” and “apostle” to these three women must be examples of flexible vocabulary and does not imply office is simply to beg the question. Paul’s description of these women is itself the evidence that these women did hold office. (Moreover, as noted at the beginning of this essay, since there are remarkably few men who are identified by name as holding office in the New Testament either, Martin’s criteria would eliminate all but a handful of men from being office holders as well.)

The strongest argument that these women exercised office is that Paul speaks of them in exactly the same way that he speaks of men of whom we would have no hesitation to attribute office. Linda Belleville states succinctly: “The language Paul uses for the ministries of these women is that which he uses for his own missionary labors and the labors of other colleagues . . . .”<sup>98</sup> It is precisely because of possible ambiguity of vocabulary that I have not simply asserted that these women held office, but argued that the language Paul uses in reference to them is exactly the kind of language he

uses in describing men who held office. Phoebe is not simply described as a "servant," but as a *diakonos* (masculine ending) of the church at Cenchyrae in a manner parallel to the language applied to deacons in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8,12. The term "co-worker" (*synergos*) that Paul applies to Priscilla is used in exactly the same way that he applies it to male co-workers such as Titus (2 Cor. 8:23), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Clement (Phil. 4:3), Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2), Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke (Phil. 24), and, finally, Urbanus (Rom. 16:7) in the same chapter in which Paul speaks of Priscilla. Priscilla and Aquila are described as leaders of the church and teachers in exactly the same way that Paul describes his other "co-workers." Moreover, 1 Corinthians 16:16, the passage in which Paul asks his readers to "submit" to his "co-workers," and to which Martin appeals as the kind of office which could not be applied to someone like Priscilla says nothing about the sex of the "co-workers." If the ministry-team of Priscilla and Aquila were a male ministry-team such as Paul and Barnabbas (Acts 15:22), Paul and Silas (Acts 15:40), or Barnabbas and Mark (Acts 15:39), it is difficult to imagine that anyone would suggest that their ministries should not be described as "office."

Finally, as I have argued above, the evidence is overwhelming that Andronicus and Junia were not only a husband-wife ministry team, but also "outstanding apostles," not simply "messengers." Paul's unqualified use of "the apostles" in reference to them indicates that he places their ministry in the same category as his own; they were witnesses to the risen Christ who had been commissioned to preach the gospel.

I conclude with a quotation from New Testament scholar Ben Witherington:

*Paul's specific commendation of seven of the nine women named in this chapter and his reference to Phoebe's role as a deacon are extremely significant. While contemporary believers divide over ordination of women, women teaching men*

and the like, this chapter suggests that such objections, in general, would have puzzled Paul. . . . The conclusion then follows that Paul has no problem with women as teachers (Priscilla) or leaders, proclaimers, or missionaries of the Good News.<sup>99</sup>

Did women exercise ministries in the New Testament period that would later be designated as office? All of the evidence indicates that the answer is “Yes.”

<sup>1</sup>See Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 90-93, 108-109.

<sup>2</sup>Martin, 95.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, 109.

<sup>4</sup>Martin, 110-112.

<sup>5</sup>Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 453. Payne specifically mentions the lack of specific reference to the names of male overseers (bishops), but the above list shows that this is true of the office of presbyter as well. The two exceptions would be 1 Peter 5:1 where the writer identifies himself as a “fellow elder” and 2 and 3 John where the writer identifies himself as “the elder.” Assuming (for argument’s sake), the traditional authorship of these letters, the apostolic authors Peter and John are identified as “presbyters,” but not explicitly named as such.

<sup>6</sup>Martin, 113.

<sup>7</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 107-111.

<sup>8</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary Romans 9-16* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 886; N.T. Wright, “The Letter

to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 10* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 761.

[9](#)Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 376, 379-380.

[10](#)Dunn, 900.

[11](#)Linda Belleville notes that English translations from the 1940's to the 1980's tended to "obscure" Paul's descriptions of these women: "[W]omen can't be leaders, so the language of leadership must be eliminated. Phoebe becomes a 'servant' and Paul's 'helper' (instead of a deacon and Paul's patron . . . )." Linda Belleville, "Women Leaders in the Bible," *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InerVarsity Press, 2004), 116. Craig Keener writes that the RSV "badly translates" *prostatis* as "helper." Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992, 2004), 240. Dunn writes that "The unwillingness of commentators to give προστάτις its most natural and obvious sense of 'patron' is most striking . . ." Dunn, 888.

[12](#)As complementarian Wayne Grudem is eager to point out. Grudem recognizes correctly that the key issue has to do with "office": "The question is whether Paul has a church office in view ('deacon') or is simply honoring Phoebe for her service to the church . . ." Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 264.

[13](#)Dunn, 886; Payne, 61; Witherington, Romans, 382.

[14](#)Dunn, 887.

[15](#)Witherington, *Women in the New Testament*, 113; Pliny speaks of two female slaves who were called *ministrae* in Bithynia. Dunn, 887.

[16](#)Wright, *Romans*, 761-762.

[17](#)Keener, 239. This was noted as long ago as 1917 by B.H. Streeter, who asked, "Why is it that the translators, when interpreting it [*diakonos*] for men, use the word *ministers*, when for women, the word *servant*?" B.H. Streeter and Edith Picton Tubervill, *Woman the Church* (London: F. Fisher Unwin, 1917), 63; cited Keener, 239.

[18](#)Keener, 238.

[19](#)Keener, 239.

[20](#)Dunn, 886, 887.

[21](#)Dunn, 888.

[22](#)Keener, 240.

[23](#)Witherington, *Women in the New Testament*, 114.

[24](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 384.

[25](#)Wright, 762.

[26](#)Payne, 62-63.

[27](#)Lydia (Acts 17:12) would be another example of such a wealthy patron. Dunn, 889.

[28](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 381.

[29](#)Dunn, 891.

[30](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 385; Witherington, *Women*, 114; Dunn, 891; Payne, 64; Wright, 762; Keener, 240-241

[31](#)Dunn, 892.



[32](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 386; Dunn, 893.

[33](#)Payne, 64.

[34](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 385; Belleville, "Women Leaders," 122.

[35](#)Witherington, *Women*, 111; *Romans*, 385; Dunn, 892.

[36](#)"In light of what we have learned about Paul's συνεργοί, this text strongly suggests that the two women engaged in spreading the gospel with Paul." Witherington, *Women*, 111-112; Witherington, *Romans*, 392-393; Payne, 67.

[37](#)Witherington, *Women*, 154.

[38](#)Grudem (179) dismisses the example of Priscilla as a teacher by distinguishing between public and private teaching, appealing to 1 Timothy 2:12 for warrant, but nothing in 1 Timothy 2:12 makes a distinction between private and public teaching. See my essay "Concerning Women's Ordination: Speaking and Teaching," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-speaking-and-teaching/>.

[39](#)Dunn, 893-894; Witherington, *Women*, 114; *Romans*, 387; Wright, 762.

[40](#)See my essay, "Concerning Women's Ordination: The Argument 'From Tradition' is not the 'Traditional' Argument," <http://willgwitt.org/theology/concerning-womens-ordination-the-argument-from-tradition-is-not-the-traditional-argument/>.

[41](#)*Ep. Ad Romanos* 31.2; PG 60.669-760; cited by Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 32.

[42](#)Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 166.

[43](#)Linda Belleville, "'Ιουυνιαν . . . ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς

ἀποστόλοις: A Re-examination of Romans 16:7 in Light of Primary Source Materials," *New Testament Studies* 51, 231-149; 236.

[44](#)Wayne Grudem and John Piper, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 80; Grudem continues to make this claim in *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 225.

[45](#)Epp, 34; Belleville, "Re-examination," 236.

[46](#)Bauckham, 166-167, note; Belleville, "Re-examination," 235.

[47](#)Epp, 72.

[48](#)Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, trans. David Kepp (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 358.

[49](#)Hauke, 359.

[50](#)Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 237

[51](#)Jonathan Baker, ed. *Consecrated Women? A Contribution to the Bishops Debate* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2004), 66.

[52](#)Epp, 35; Bauckham, 167.

[53](#)Epp, 38.

[54](#)Belleville, "Re-examination," 236-239. Hauke makes the rather embarrassing error of concluding that *Iounian* must be male because the word is masculine in form, with a circumflex accent (Hauke, 359). There would have been no accents when Paul wrote Rom. 16:7!

[55](#)Epp, 58.

[56](#)William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian*

*Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 381.

[57](#)Epp, 67; “The assumption that only men could be apostles and that therefore the name must be male was thereafter dominant down to the 1970s.” Bauckham, 167.

[58](#)Bauckham, 166.

[59](#)Epp, 39.

[60](#)Richard S. Cervin, “A Note Regarding the Name ‘Junia(s)’ in Romans 16.7,” *New Testament Studies* 40(1994):464-470; 464-466; “But the simple fact is that the masculine form has been found nowhere else, and the name is more naturally taken as Ἰουνίαν = Junia.” Patristic commentators take it for granted that it is Junia. “The assumption that it must be male is a striking indictment of male presumption . . .” Dunn, 894.

[61](#)Belleville, Re-examination, 239; “The simple fact is that Ἰουνιάς is absent from the Koine of the day. It does not appear in any inscription, letterhead, piece of writing, or epitaph . . . The accusative form in Greek would be masculine Ἰουνίου , or Ἰουνῶν – leaving no room for a Ἰουνίαν.” Belleville, “Re-examination,” 240. Hauke (359) points to “Silvanus” being shortened to “Silas” as an example of name shortening (Acts 15:40) similar to “Junias,” but Belleville points out correctly that Paul himself uses “Silvanus,” not “Silas” (2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thes. 1:1).

[62](#)Cervin, 467-469.

[63](#)“Junias . . . cannot be documented in the Greco-Roman world . . . Hence I conclude, with a high degree of confidence, that to date a bona fide instance of Junias, whether in Greek or Latin, has not been found. . . .The clear result of this lengthy discussion of ‘Junias’ (masculine) is that, at least to date, this presumably male name is nowhere attested in the Greco-Roman world.” Epp, 33, 35, 43; “[T]he name Junias is not attested among the thousands of Greek names preserved from

antiquity. Even examples of the names Junius and Junianus are rare." Bauckham, 168; "The feminine 'Ιουνία . . . appears widely and frequently. . . 'Ιουνιάς does not appear even once." Belleville, 241.

[64](#)Bauckham, 169; "The assumption that it must be male is a striking indictment of male presumption regarding the character and structure of earliest Christianity." Dunn, 894.

[65](#)Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7," *New Testament Studies* 47 (2001) 76-91.

[66](#)Cited by Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 224, and *Consecrated Women?*, 66.

[67](#)Cervin, 470.

[68](#)Burer and Wallace, 84.

[69](#)Burer and Wallace, 86

[70](#)Burer and Wallace, 86.

[71](#)Burer and Wallace, 87.

[72](#)Burer and Wallace, 88.

[73](#)Burer and Wallace, 90.

[74](#)Burer and Wallace, 89.

[75](#)Bauckham, *Gospel Women*; 172-179; Belleville, "Re-examination," 242-248; Epp, 72-78.

[76](#)Bauckham, 174.

[77](#)Belleville, "Re-examination," 242.

[78](#)Epp, 73.

[79](#)Bauckham, 174-175.

[80](#)Bauckham, 175-176.

[81](#)Belleville, "Re-Examination," 247.

[82](#)Bauckham, 176.

[83](#)Bauckham, 178; Epp, 74.

[84](#)Belleville, "Re-examination," 245; Epp, 75.

[85](#)Witherington, *Romans*, 390.

[86](#)Belleville, "Re-examination," 243.

[87](#)Despite their claims to the contrary, their Hellenistic examples bear the inclusive, not the exclusive meaning. Belleville, Re-examination, 244-245.

[88](#)Epp, 78.

[89](#)Bauckham, 179; also Witherington, *Romans*, 390; Epp, 69.

[90](#)Grudem, 227.

[91](#)Epp, 70; Bauckham, 180; Witherington, *Romans*, 390;

[92](#)Dunn, 894. Another possibility, defended at length by Bauckham, is that Junia was the same person as the "Joanna" mentioned by Luke (Luke 8:3; 24:10). Bauckham, 181-186.

[93](#)Bauckham, 181.

[94](#)Martin, 100-101.

[95](#)Martin, 106-107.

[96](#)Martin, 100.

[97](#)Martin, 108.

[98](#)Belleville, "Re-examination," 231.