



Who was Saint Junia? I believe the answer is straightforward: In the earliest generation of Christianity, there was a female Apostle named *Junia* whom Paul said was prominent among the Apostles before he himself was converted (1). Junia and her co-worker in the faith, Andronicus, were among several women and men greeted by Paul (Romans 16:7): "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me." Some scholars have translated her name as male – 'Junias'

– but no such masculine name is found in any extant Greek or Latin document of the New Testament era. The feminine, *Junia*, appears in over 250 Greek or Latin inscriptions in Rome alone. The feminine form for the name was dominant in the writings of the Church Fathers for the first thousand years of Christianity. Only since the Middle Ages, largely due to Luther's translation, did the view that *Junia* was a man by the name of 'Junias' begin to prevail. Cultural values led to the assumption that the gender had to be masculine because women couldn't possibly be apostles, which contributed to controversies about women's ordination, especially in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Another example of mistranslation dilutes the status of *Junia* by rendering the passage as "well known *to* the Apostles" rather than "distinguished *among* the Apostles." Grammatical features argue for the latter interpretation based upon comparison with Hellenistic literature, including a nearly perfect parallel to the Romans passage being found in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* [438]. A detailed assessment of the various translations, exegetical and interpretive issues was recently published, which resolved the *Junia* controversies (2). Current scholarship is nearly unanimous that Romans 16, where Junia is mentioned, is part of the original letter that Phoebe delivered to Rome. Phoebe, a deacon and Paul's benefactor, was thus the letter's first bearer and interpreter. Several women were specifically singled out in this passage for their labor on behalf of the Gospel, not just because they were partners or wives.

There are two passages in the New Testament that have been cited to argue that Paul believed women were to be excluded from teaching roles in the church:

I Corinthians 14:34-35: These verses are believed by most scholars to have been a later insertion into Paul's original letter (3).

I Timothy 2:8-15: These verses are believed to have been written by a later Paulist who tended toward circumscribed roles for women, a trend that had already begun in Ephesians and Colossians. Aside from 1 and 2 Timothy, there

are other pastoral epistles which are also viewed by many scholars as deutero-Pauline or which are debated (4).

A newly published work by Leland E. Wilshire (5) who used the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (TLG) data base to trace the usage of the Greek wording usually interpreted as not permitting women to teach or have authority over men. The TLG includes every known ancient Greek document in electronic form. The crucial word is the infinitive *authentein* in I Tim 2:12. Dr. Wilshire analyzed the TLG database citations over a four-century period, 200 BCE to 200 CE. Very few of them could be interpreted as "exercising authority," "holding sway or using power," or "being dominant." There was a mixture of contextual meanings at the time of the NT, but Dr. Wilshire concluded "the preponderant number...have to do with self willed violence, criminal action, or murder or reference to the person who does these actions....The word *authentein* with its meaning of 'instigating violence' could either be a literary hyperbole, an exaggeration meant to lend power by overstatement ...or it could be a straight forward term showing the gravity of a particular incident in the life of the fellowship at Ephesus." Dr. Wilshire noted that there were other words available (*sige, phimos*) to express 'silence' if this had been Paul's concern. "Instigating violence" at 2:12b could "...also be the action that stands behind the appeal for self restraint (*sophrosunes*) that ends the section in 2:15." The consistent theme throughout the passage is a plea for peace and absence of trouble in the Ephesian fellowship.

The transition from home churches to public buildings for Christian meetings was associated with social and political pressures to alter the status of women in the second century CE, effectively eliminating the potential for priesthood as well as most other meaningful leadership and teaching roles for women for the next 1,900 years.

So why is Junia important to us today? She and other women who were mentioned in scripture provide an important window of understanding into the first several decades of Christianity. By recovering who Junia was to Paul and his contemporaries, we come closer to an understanding of the revolutionary freedom in Christ found in the Gospels, which has been diminished by mistranslation and misinterpretation. Today, we can renew our courage in remembering and celebrating the works of Junia, Phoebe, Prisca, Mary Magdalene as well as Paul, Peter, James, and the other Apostles who first carried forth and taught the Gospel of Christ. Jew or Gentile, servant or free, male or female – there was and is no difference in Christ Jesus. You are encouraged to recover freedom in Christ and to enjoy his friendship and blessings!

- (1) Romans 16:7: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners; they are prominent among the apostles and they were in Christ before me."
- (2) Epp, Eldon Jay (2005). Junia: The First Woman Apostle. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
www.Fortresspress.com
- (3) Factors favoring interpolation include: These verses interrupt the preceding discussion about prophecy, spoiling the train of thought. Its content contradicts I Cor 11:2ff. It contains non-Pauline language. Verse 37 does not link with 36, but with 33a. [Hans Conzelmann (1985) *op.cit* in Epp (2005)]
- (4) Most scholars believe that 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians, 1, 2 Timothy, and Titus were not penned by Paul. There are differences in vocabulary, writing style, theology, and in some instances, the historical situations they presuppose came after Paul's day. See Bart Ehrman (2003). The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, 2nd Ed. NY: Oxford Press.
- (5) Wilshire, Leland E. Leland E. Wilshire (2010). Insight into two Biblical passages: "The Anatomy of a Prohibition" 1 Timothy 2:12, the TLG Computer, and the Christian Church. "The Servant City": The "servant Songs" of Isaiah 40-66 and the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC/BCE. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc. www.univpress.com

Note: Rev. Kathryn A. Piccard+, an Episcopal priest, has a book *in press* that any fans of St. Junia will want to acquire. When Kathryn+ stayed at St. Junia's House for two weeks last summer while she was attending the Episcopal meeting in Anaheim, she blessed me with a pre-publication copy. The Biblical Apostles Andronicus and Junia: Introducing the History of their Veneration as Saints. To be published at LULU.com. I will notify you when it is available. Rev. Kathryn also publishes a newsletter about Junia and the communities that honor her. You can contact her at kapiccard@comcast.net