

## **An Analysis of Gendered Terminologies in the Book of Romans and Their Influence on Women's Leadership**

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### **Abstract**

Translations of the gendered terms in the book of Romans play a decisive role in shaping contemporary understandings of gender, authority, and leadership within Christian communities. Nevertheless, many renderings of gendered terms, such as *διακονος* (deacon), *αποστολος* (apostle), *συνεργος* (co-workers), *αδελφοι* (brother) and *προστατις* (benefactor), have historically obscured or minimised women's roles in early Christian leadership. This article examines these terms through a linguistic and historical-biblical lens, showing how mistranslation has obscured women's leadership in the early church. The study highlights how translation choices reflect and reinforce theological assumptions about women's authority through linguistic, textual, and socio-historical analysis. Special attention is given to passages referencing figures such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla, whose leadership designations have been contested or downplayed in certain translations. The study argues that more accurate, context-sensitive research reveals a consistent Pauline recognition of women in ministerial and apostolic roles. Ultimately, this work underscores the ethical responsibility of translators to avoid gender bias and faithfully reflect the text's original meaning. Such accuracy enriches biblical scholarship and contributes to contemporary discussions on inclusivity, equity, and the legitimacy of women's leadership in Christian traditions.

**Keywords:** Gender, Gendered Terms, Women's leadership, Authority, Leadership

## 1. Introduction

The book of Romans 16:1-16 study reveals the presence of women in leadership roles within the early church, a presence often obscured by translation and interpretation biases. In this book, Paul mentions Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla among others, showing women's important role in early Christian leadership.<sup>1</sup> Terms such as διάκονος (deacon) and προστάτις (benefactor), related to Phoebe, and συνεργούς (co-workers) related to other women like Prisca, are examined to understand their leadership roles.<sup>2</sup> These translations are not just about the words that have influenced church beliefs and organisation. Recent scholarly works encourage translation methods that better reflect Paul's message of inclusion.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the historical context of the Greco-Roman world suggests that women held leadership roles. This view sheds light on understanding the cultural backdrop of the passages.<sup>4</sup> Despite significant advances in biblical scholarship, the translation of gendered terms in the Book of Romans remains a contested and consequential issue. Key Greek words in the book of Romans describing women's roles, such as διάκονος (deacon) and προστάτις (benefactor) related to Phoebe, and συνεργούς (co-workers) and the name Iouanian (Junia), have often been rendered inconsistently or inaccurately in English translations. These translation choices can obscure, minimise, or even erase the leadership and agency of women in the early Christian communities that Paul addressed.<sup>5</sup> As a result, theological interpretations and

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<sup>1</sup> Susan E. Hylen, *Finding Phoebe: What New Testament Women Were Really Like* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2023), 55.

<sup>2</sup> Marieke Sybrandi, "Women Leaders Lost in Translation? A Study in Romans 16:1–16," *The Expository Times* 136, no. 3 (December 2024): 93–104, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00145246241287148>.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 1-6.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Mathew, *Women in the Greetings of Romans 16.1-16: A Study of Mutuality and Women's Ministry in the Letter to the Romans*, vol. 471 (London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives*. 1-6

church practices have sometimes been shaped more by translation tradition than by the text's original intent and context.

This article addresses the problem of how gendered Greek terms in Romans have been translated, examines the implications of these choices for understanding women's roles, and argues for translation practices that faithfully reflect the text's historical and theological realities. This analysis serves to 1) identify where and how translation choices have affected the visibility and significance of women in Romans; 2) determine the consistency and accuracy of principal English translations in rendering these terms; 3) explore the theological and practical implications of translation for both historical interpretation and contemporary church practice; 4) propose translation strategies that more faithfully reflect the original Greek and the intent of the Pauline text; 5) contribute to a more accurate and inclusive understanding of the New Testament, ensuring that the leadership and agency of women in Romans are neither diminished nor overlooked due to translation decisions.

This study chose a philological approach, exegetical and comparative methodologies to ensure fidelity to the Greek text, a historical lens situates these terms within first-century cultural contexts, and a translation-critical framework uncovers how subsequent translators shaped ecclesial reception. To maintain the accuracy of word meaning, lexical resources are used to identify the range of meanings. The established meanings of the terms are finally compared with various English versions.

## **2. Ancient Literature on Gendered Terms in the Book of Romans**

The Book of Romans, attributed to the Apostle Paul, demonstrates a nuanced use of gendered language and social concepts that mirror the cultural context of the Roman Empire. This analysis explores the gendered terms in Romans, their implications for understanding gender roles in early Christianity, and the broader societal norms of that period.

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## 2.1 Gender Roles in the Roman Context

In ancient Rome, rigid gender roles were clearly defined, with societal norms dictating the behaviours and responsibilities of men and women. Men were primarily associated with public activities, authority, and military duties, whereas women were generally confined to domestic responsibilities, valued primarily for their reproductive capabilities.<sup>6</sup> The Roman ideal for women centred on childbearing and household management, as evidenced by funerary inscriptions highlighting a woman's role as a mother and housekeeper. Philosophical perspectives that depicted men as active and women as passive reinforced this social stratification, thereby solidifying gender hierarchies.<sup>7</sup>

## 2.2 Paul's Radical Reinterpretation of Gender

Paul's writings, particularly in Romans and Galatians, confront these traditional norms. In Galatians 3:28, Paul declares that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female," highlighting a profound equality among believers in Christ.<sup>8</sup> This embodies an early Christian vision to transcend the strict social hierarchies of the Roman era. By focusing on unity in Christ, Paul regarded the Christian community as a space where conventional gender roles could be redefined, encouraging a more egalitarian approach to worship and community life.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.3 Gendered Language in Romans

The language in the book Romans provides insight into early Christian perspectives on gender. Paul frequently refers to his audience as "brothers and sisters," emphasising women's

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<sup>6</sup> Rebecca I. Denova, *Varieties of Early Christianity*, 1st ed. (Oxford UK, Berlin, Singapore, and Australia: Wiley-Blackwell, 2023), 162.

<sup>7</sup> Eric M. Orlin, *A Social and Cultural History of Republican Rome*, 1st ed. (Oxford UK, Berlin, Singapore, and Australia: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 134.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Karl Gnuse. "Trajectories of Justice: What the bible says about Slaves, Women and Homosexuality." (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015), 85.

<sup>9</sup> Gnuse, *Trajectories of Justice*, 86.

involvement in faith and community.<sup>10</sup> This inclusive expression contrasts with the societal norms of that era, which often marginalised women in religious and public spheres. By employing such terms, Paul acknowledges women's presence in the church and elevates their role within the community.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. The Role of Women in Early Christianity

Despite the patriarchal society, women actively contributed to the early Christian movement. Paul mentions women like Phoebe, whom he calls a deacon, and Priscilla, who is recognised as a co-worker in ministry. However, Paul wants the reader to read within the context.<sup>12</sup> These mentions indicate that women were not just passive recipients of Paul's teachings but played crucial roles in spreading Christianity. This involvement challenges the notion of a strictly hierarchical church and suggests that early Christian communities may have been more inclusive than Roman ones.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, the Book of Romans highlights a notable shift in gender perception during early Christianity, using gendered language and redefining social roles. Paul's teachings advocate for gender equality and inclusivity, contesting the traditional norms of the Roman Empire. This shift impacted the early church and set the stage for ongoing debates about gender and equality in Christian theology. These texts' implications continue to shape contemporary conversations about gender roles in religious communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Hannah Matis, *A History of Women in Christianity to 1600*, 1st ed. (USA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), 29.

<sup>11</sup> Ute E. Eisen, Heidrun E. Mader, and Peter Lampe, eds., *Talking God in Society: Multidisciplinary (Re)Constructions of Ancient (Con)Texts: Festschrift for Peter Lampe: Volume 1: Theories and Applications* \$ edited by Ute E. Eisen and Heidrun E. Mader in Cooperation with Mirjam Daume-Wolff, Kathleen Ess, Laura Viktoria Richter, Kaja Wieczorek, *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus Studien Zur Umwelt Des Neuen Testaments*, volume 120, no 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 124 <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666573170>.

<sup>12</sup> David I. Starling, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics* (Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Matis, *A History of Women in Christianity to 1600*, 30.

#### 4. Philological Analysis of Gendered Terms

Starting with the word διάκονος (deacon), Paul uses the word to address Phoebe. He calls her diakonos of the church (Rom. 16:1). The term is also used by Paul and Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5). Unlike “servant,” epigraphic evidence shows that the word functioned as an official title, applying to both men and women. Translating it as “deacon” confirms Phoebe’s church role.<sup>14</sup> Another gendered term is ἀπόστολος (apostle). Using this word, Junia is recognised as “outstanding among the apostles” (Rom. 16:7), placing her within apostolic authority. In Greco-Roman settings, apostle was a messenger entrusted with delegated authority. Translating it “well known to the apostles” reaffirms her authority.<sup>15</sup> The word is followed by the word συνεργός (co-worker). In the NT uses the word is attributed to Prisca, Aquila, Euodia, and Syntyche. These fellows are called Paul’s συνεργοί (Rom. 16:3; Phil. 4:3). The term means that the individuals were co-workers, emphasising equality rather than subordination. Greco-Roman usage confirms the sense of collaboration in professional, civic, and religious settings. Another word in this analysis is ἀδελφοί (brother). Paul regularly addresses his congregations as ἀδελφοί (Rom. 12:1), a kinship term inclusive of men and women, as evidenced by Greco-Roman customs. Translating it as “brothers and sisters” accurately captures this inclusivity.<sup>16</sup> Lastly, the analysis considers the word προστάτις (benefactor). The word is used in relation to Phoebe. She is described as προστάτις (Rom. 16:2), meaning she served as a patron and benefactor. In the Greco-Roman world, wealthy women were respected as patrons of civic and religious groups, a role reflected in Paul’s description.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> C. Suganya and Dezy B. Wankhede, “BDAG-A Proficient Approach with Closed Frequent Pattern,” *International Journal* vol 2, no. 7 (July 2014), 34-42. <https://www.academia.edu/download/35665632/V2I7-0018.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> John Thorley, “Junia, a Woman Apostle,” *Novum Testamentum* 38, no. Fasc. 1 (1996): 18–29.

<sup>16</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Women in the Church* (Berrien Springs, USA: Biblical Perspectives, 1987), 82.

<sup>17</sup> Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan, *Women in the New Testament* (Washington DC: Liturgical Press, 2001), 255.

## 5. Word Study

This section focuses on word study of the gendered terms explained in section four. The section analyses the immediate context of each term, lexical meaning, occurrences in the NT, translation, theological implications and significance. Starting with the word *διάκονος*, the lexical meaning and usage are attributed to English words “servant,” “minister,” or “deacon.”<sup>18</sup> Classical Greek refers to the word for someone who waited on tables or performed service. In the New Testament, the term evolves to denote general service and, in some contexts, an official church office (1 Timothy 3:8,12). In the New Testament the word has been used to denote Jesus’s ministry “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (*diakonos*)...” (Mark 10:45). On the same note, the word is used for Paul and his co-workers “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (*diakonoi*)...” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Moreover, the word is used for those who occupied church offices “Deacons likewise must be dignified...” (1 Timothy 3:8). Lastly, the word is used to identify an individual “Phoebe” who served the Church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1). Contextual setting of the word as it is found in Roman 6:1 focuses on introduction Phoebe as “a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” The definite article (*τὴν διάκονον*) and the phrase “of the church” suggest an official capacity, not just general service. Paul reinforces the introduction by using the same term for male church leaders.<sup>19</sup> Regarding translation choices, some English versions render the word as “servant” (KJV, NASB), while others render it as “deacon” (NIV, NRSV). The latter is more consistent with Paul’s usage of the term for the church office and affirms Phoebe’s leadership role. Taking note of these differences, translating *διάκονος* as “deacon” for Phoebe supports the view that women held recognised positions of authority in the early church.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen D. Renn, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Massachusetts, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 243.

<sup>19</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 208.

<sup>20</sup> Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (USA: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 210.

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It challenges interpretations that restrict women's ministry based on later church traditions. Theological implication lies in the interpretation of the word. When interpreted correctly, term deacon in Romans 16:1 points to Phoebe's status as an official church leader when examined in its lexical, contextual, and theological dimensions. An accurate translation is essential for recognising the historical reality of women's leadership in the New Testament.

The second word in this word study is προστάτις. Lexical meaning of this noun is derived from the verb προιστιμι, meaning "to stand before," "to lead," or "to preside over." In classical and Hellenistic Greek, the word referred to a "patron," "protector," or "benefactor," someone who provides support, protection, or sponsorship, often with social or financial influence.<sup>21</sup> In secular Greek, the word was used for individuals, often women, who acted as patrons or protectors, especially in civic or religious contexts. Being in the masculine form, the word was used for leaders or presidents of assemblies. In the New Testament, the word appears only in Romans 16:2, where it describes Phoebe. The immediate context of the word, as it appears in Romans 16:2, is that Paul reports that Phoebe was a προστάτις for his ministry. He writes "...for she has been a προστατις of many and of myself as well." The context suggests that Phoebe was a supporter and a person of authority and means, likely providing financial, social, and possibly legal assistance to Paul and others in the church.<sup>22</sup> In view of translation choices, some English versions translate προστατις as "helper" (NASB), "succourer" (KJV), or "benefactor/patron" (NIV, NRSV). The latter versions are more accurate because the translations that use "helper" can minimise the authoritative and influential connotations of the Greek term. Theological implications and significance of this analysis assert that Phoebe's status as a προστάτις highlights her position of leadership, agency, and significant role in the early

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<sup>21</sup> Renn, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 243.

<sup>22</sup> James B. Prothro, "Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament: Studies in Tools, Methods, and Practice by Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015. Pp. Xvi + 432. Paper, \$40.00.," *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 3 (September 2016): 208–208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/rsr.12576>.

Christian community.<sup>23</sup> It affirms that women could be patrons and leaders, not just passive supporters. When this term is understood in its lexical and historical context, it points to Phoebe's status as a prominent patron and leader. Thus, faithful translation of this term is crucial for acknowledging women's influential roles in the early church.

The third word studied is the Greek name Ἰουνία (Iounian) which is attributed to apostleship. Lexical study indicates that the word is the accusative form of Ἰουνία (Junia), a common female name in the Greco-Roman world.<sup>24</sup> The passage reads: "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and fellow prisoners. They are outstanding among the apostles and were in Christ before I was" (Romans 16:7). In ancient literature, the name Junia is well attested as a female name in Greek and Latin inscriptions. There is no evidence for a masculine form (Junias) in the period. Early church fathers such as John Chrysostom and Origen unanimously understood Junia as a woman and an apostle.<sup>25</sup> The immediate context of the word, as it appears in Romans 16:7, centres on Paul's commendation. He commends Junia and Andronicus as "outstanding apostles among others. The Greek phrase ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις (outstanding among the apostles) means that they were notable or prominent within the group of apostles, not just well-known to them.<sup>26</sup> The word has been translated differently by various Bible versions. The KJV translation render the name as "Junias" (masculine), but neither the Greek manuscripts nor historical evidence support this translation. Most modern translations (NIV, NRSV, ESV) correctly use "Junia" and recognise her as a woman. Being a woman, the phrase "outstanding among the apostles" affirms that Junia was recognised as an apostle, a title denoting authority and leadership in the early church. This recognition challenges assumptions that apostleship was limited to men.<sup>27</sup> The theological implications and significance of this analysis, which is based on both lexical evidence and early church

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<sup>23</sup> Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 298.

<sup>24</sup> Gary Alan Chamberlain, *Greek of the Septuagint* (United States of America: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 118.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Prothro, "Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament." 208

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

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interpretation, identify Junia as a prominent female apostle.<sup>28</sup> This recognition of her status is essential for understanding the inclusive nature of leadership in the early Christian movement.

The fourth word in this analysis is συνεργός found in Roman 16:3. Lexical analysis reveals that the noun συνεργός is a compound of syn (with, together) and ergon (work), meaning “co-worker,” “fellow worker,” or “collaborator.”<sup>29</sup> In the New Testament, Paul uses the noun to refer to those who supported his ministry, regardless of gender. In the New Testament, Paul frequently uses the word for both men and women who assisted him in his missionary work (Romans 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Corinthians 3:9; Philippians 2:25; Colossians 4:11). In Romans 16:3, Paul refers to Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquila as “my co-workers in Christ Jesus.” The context tells that Paul greets Prisca and Aquila as his co-workers, indicating a partnership in ministry.<sup>30</sup> The term is gender-neutral and is used for male and female co-workers, highlighting equality in their contributions to the mission.<sup>31</sup> Considering translation choices, most modern English translations render συνεργός as “co-worker” or “fellow worker.” Older translations (KJV) use “helper,” which can imply a subordinate role, but the Greek emphasises collaboration and partnership. Using συνεργός for Prisca, a woman, and Aquila, a man, demonstrates that Paul viewed women as equal partners in ministry. This supports the argument that women held significant and recognised roles in the early church. The term συνεργός in Romans 16:3, when understood in its lexical and contextual dimensions, affirms the collaborative and non-hierarchical nature of ministry in the early Christian movement.<sup>32</sup> A faithful translation of this term is important for recognising the full participation of women like Prisca in the gospel's work.

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<sup>28</sup> Chamberlain, *Greek of the Septuagint*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Renn, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 244.

<sup>30</sup> Mathew, *Women in the Greetings of Romans 16.1-16*, vol. 471, 154-155.

<sup>31</sup> Porter, *Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 367-368.

<sup>32</sup> Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 299.

## 6. Historical-biblical Contextualization

In this section, the study analyses gender roles and language, drawing on Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural backgrounds to situate Paul's language in its original context. The first analysis is of women in Jewish Synagogues. Jewish tradition and epigraphic evidence show that women served as leaders of synagogues, such as Rufina of Smyrna. Inscriptions also document female deacons and donors, indicating women held visible roles in synagogue leadership.<sup>33</sup> In Greco-Roman Religion, female religious authority was common. The Vestal Virgins of Rome wielded ritual and political influence, while the priestesses of Artemis in Ephesus held cultic significance. Such roles made female leadership familiar to Paul's audiences.<sup>34</sup> On the same note, in the Greco-Roman setting, women served as Civic Patrons. Throughout the empire, inscriptions recognise women as civic benefactors who supported buildings, associations, and festivals. The title προστατις reflects Phoebe's role, placing it within a wider Mediterranean pattern.<sup>35</sup> This awareness has a significant implication for Pauline communities in the book of Romans. By calling Phoebe διακονοσ and προστατις, Junia αποστολοσ, and others as σψνεργοι, Paul was not inventing strange and new terms but using established categories that his hearers understood. However, later patriarchal translations hide this fact. When Pauline's terminology in the book of Romans is analysed both linguistically and historically, the evidence points to the same conclusion. Paul saw women as leaders, patrons, apostles, and collaborators within his communities. These roles fit wider Greco-Roman practices of female authority in religion and civic life. By accurately translating Paul's words, without the influence of later patriarchal biases, we can restore the complete vision of inclusive

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<sup>33</sup> Aime Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* (United States of America: Ignatius Press, 2017), 101-106.

<sup>34</sup> Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 146.

<sup>35</sup> Lesly F. Massey, *Women and the New Testament: An Analysis of Scripture in Light of New Testament Era Culture* (USA: McFarland, 2024), 1-6.

leadership that Paul intended, and challenge narrow theological traditions.

## **7. Translation Critique of Gendered Terms in the Book of Romans**

Translation is never a neutral process. The history of biblical translation shows how ideological, cultural, and church biases have deeply influenced biblical texts.<sup>36</sup> Words like διακονος, αποστολος, συνεργος, αδελφοι, and προστατις have often been minimised in translations, hiding women's leadership and reinforcing patriarchal structures.<sup>37</sup> Translating gendered terms in the Book of Romans, especially in chapter 16, is crucial for faithfully representing women's roles in the early church. Recent scholarship and translation debates highlight how certain Greek words, when rendered imprecisely, can obscure or diminish women's leadership and ministry.<sup>38</sup>

### **7.1 Comparing English Translations of Gendered Terms in Romans 16**

The translation of gendered terms in various English Bible Versions, particularly in Romans 16, reveals significant differences in how these texts address gender inclusivity and accuracy. This analysis compares the King James Version (KJV), the New International Version (NIV), the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). The NIV translates διακονος in Romans 16:1 as deacon, while προστατις in Romans 16:2 is translated as benefactor.<sup>39</sup> The ESV translates διακονος in Romans 16:1 as 'servant' and προστατις in Romans

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<sup>36</sup> Lisa M. Bowens et al., *Preaching Romans from Here* (Eugene, OR: Stock Publishers, 2023), 64.

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Foutz Markley Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (USA: Baker Academic, 2010), 103.

<sup>38</sup> Merrill C. Tenney and Moisés Silva, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 1008.

<sup>39</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Inner Story of the New International Version* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2023), 17.

16:2 as ‘patron’. The NRVS translates διακονος in Romans 16:1 as deacon and προστατις in Romans 16:2 as benefactor. The KJV translates διακονος in Romans 16:1 as “servant” and προστατις in Romans 16:2 as ‘succourer’.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, “deacon” and “benefactor/patron” are more accurate in Greek and better highlight Phoebe’s leadership. “Servant” and “helper” can minimise her role. The NIV translates Junia as outstanding among *the apostles*, ESV has a phrase “well known to *the apostles*” NRSV uses “as prominent among *the apostles*” KJV has “as of note among *the apostles*” NASB uses as outstanding among *the apostles*, and CSB put it “as noted among *the apostles*.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore, most modern translations now use “Junia” (female) and recognise her as an apostle. The KJV use “Junias” (a male name), which is not supported by the earliest manuscripts. In the book of Romans 16:3, where Prisca/Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, the NIV translates the word συνεργος as my co-workers, the ESV translates as “my fellow workers,” the NRSV translates it as “my co-workers” the KJV translates as “my helpers” the NASB translates as “my fellow workers” and the CSB translates it as “my co-workers”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, “Co-worker” or “fellow worker” accurately reflects the Greek and shows equality in ministry. “Helper” (KJV) is less precise and can imply a subordinate role. Ultimately, the modern translations increasingly reflect the original Greek by using terms like “deacon” “benefactor” and “co-worker” for women, and by recognising Junia as a female apostle. Older or more traditional translations sometimes use terms that minimise women’s roles or masculinise their names.<sup>43</sup>

## 7.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Translation

The debate over gendered language in Bible translations (Latin Vulgate, Reformation Translations, English Authorised Version, and Modern Translations) often hinges on the distinction between

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<sup>40</sup> Tenney and Silva, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 5*, 1008.

<sup>41</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 103.

<sup>42</sup> J. Daniel Hays J. Scott Duvall, *Journey into God’s Word, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2020), 57.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Edwin DeMaris and Dietmar Neufeld, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* (London: Routledge, 2010), 44.

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gender neutrality and gender inclusivity. Gender-neutral translations eliminate gender-specific references, while gender-inclusive translations seek to accurately reflect the original text's intent while being sensitive to modern understandings of gender.<sup>44</sup> The NRSV is noted for its gender-inclusive approach, often changing masculine terms to neutral ones, which some argue can lead to a loss of the original text's meaning.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, the NIV's approach has been criticised for being inconsistent, as it sometimes retains masculine terms in contexts where female gender inclusivity would be more appropriate.<sup>46</sup> This inconsistency can lead to misunderstandings about women's roles in the early church, as seen in Romans 16, where female leaders are mentioned. However, it may not be highlighted in translations that favour masculine language.<sup>47</sup>

The Latin Vulgate (Jerome, 4th century CE) influenced the Western Church for over a thousand years. In this version, ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΣ (Rom. 16:1) was translated as *minister*. In ecclesiastical use, "minister" was reserved for ordained men, effectively marginalising Phoebe's role.<sup>48</sup> Junia (Rom. 16:7) was feminised in Greek manuscripts but ambiguously rendered in the Latin Tradition, sometimes masculinised as Junias, which erases her apostolic authority.<sup>49</sup> In Reformation Translations, the protestant reformers aimed for fidelity to the Greek, but cultural patriarchy continued. Luther's German Bible translated ΔΙΑΚΟΝΟΣ for Phoebe as Διενεριν a female servant, moderating her role.<sup>50</sup> The Geneva Bible (1560) consistently translated αδελφοι as "brethren," excluding women

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<sup>44</sup> J. Scott Duvall, *Journey into God's Word, Second Edition*, 58.

<sup>45</sup> Jason Boyett, *Pocket Guide to the Bible*, 1st ed. (University of Michigan: Relevant Books, 2006), 32-36.

<sup>46</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 104.

<sup>47</sup> DeMaris and Neufeld, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011) 113-116.

<sup>49</sup> Unknown, *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament, Paperback - August 28, 2001* (Eerdmans, n.d.).

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible* (New Jersey, USA: Princeton University Press, 2013), 35.

linguistically despite contextual inclusivity.<sup>51</sup> Still, the English authorised tradition, like The King James Version (1611), cemented many gender-exclusive patterns; for instance, Σψνεργος shifted from “co-worker” to “helper,” which lessened women’s equality with Paul. Προστατις (Rom. 16:2) was simplified to “succourer” or “helper,” removing Phoebe’s patronage authority and portraying her in a passive role.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, modern translations have improved, but inconsistencies still exist. For instance, the NIV (1978) translated αδελπιοι as “brothers” in its initial edition, but later editions added “brothers and sisters.”<sup>53</sup> The ESV (2001) retains many male-exclusive renderings, reflecting complementarian theological views. The NRSV (1989) and NRSV (2021) aim for inclusive translations which render αδελπιοι as “brothers and sisters,” Junia as female, and Phoebe as “deacon.”<sup>54</sup>

### 7.3 Theological Implications

Translation choices reflect and support theological stances on gender. Exclusive renderings reinforce male-only leadership models. Inclusive renderings preserve historical accuracy and validate women’s authority. The persistence of patriarchal translations highlights the need for a critical and historically based approach to Pauline terminology.<sup>55</sup> Throughout history, translations of Paul’s writings have often minimised the role of women despite the clear language and historical context. To truly understand Paul’s message, we must accurately translate his words without allowing ecclesiastical bias to cloud our judgment. This approach is important

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<sup>51</sup> Flora Ross Amos, *Early Theories of Translation*, 1st ed. (61 West 62nd Street, New York, NY 10023: Columbia University Press, 2019), 67.

<sup>52</sup> Charles C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340–1611* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press Anniversary Collection, 2018), 178.

<sup>53</sup> Harris, *The Inner Story of the New International Version*, 18.

<sup>54</sup> Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (New York: Philosophical Library/Open Road, 2022), 89.

<sup>55</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 104.

for current discussions about women's ordination and church leadership.<sup>56</sup>

## **8. Translation Critique on the History Renderings and Gender Bias**

Translation has a crucial impact on literary traditions and cultural heritage. It serves as a means of language transfer, a vehicle for cultural exchange, and ideological expression. The link between Translation Studies and Gender Studies has raised awareness of how translations can reflect and shape gender dynamics in literature.<sup>57</sup> Translation history shows a consistent pattern where Pauline terms reduced the visibility of women's leadership. The Vulgate, which emerged in the late 4th century, is widely considered inconsistent and corrupted over time.<sup>58</sup> It was a massive undertaking that corrected the New Testament and translated the Old Testament from Hebrew, marking a significant departure from the Greek Septuagint used in earlier Latin versions.<sup>59</sup> Jerome's Vulgate was the authoritative Bible for Western Christianity for over a thousand years. Although technically accurate in some areas, its ecclesiastical use downplayed women's roles.<sup>60</sup> Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) was called a minister, but the title became gender-specific in church settings.<sup>61</sup> Junia (Rom. 16:7) was sometimes masculinised as Junias in later Latin Tradition, which obscured her apostolic identity.<sup>62</sup> In early

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<sup>56</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, 104.

<sup>57</sup> Sandra Llopart Babot, *African American Women's Literature in Spain*, 1st ed. (Av. Blasco Ibáñez, Valencia (Spain): Publicacions de la Universitat de València, 2023), 174.

<sup>58</sup> Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament, Vol. II*. (Cambridge, London: Bell and Daldy Publishers, 1861), 266.

<sup>59</sup> Rev Fr Christopher Rengers and O.F.M. Cap, *The 35 Doctors of the Church* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2014), 42-43.

<sup>60</sup> Magdalene Lampert, *The Poetics of Translation*, 1st ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 202.

<sup>61</sup> Rev Adetunji and Emmanuel Olujide, "A Study of the Roles of Phoebe and Prisca in the Epistle to the Romans in the Context of the Methodist Church Nigeria," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 (n.d.): 132–38.

<sup>62</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 27.

protestant versions, which emerged in the early 16th century, a significant push was to translate the Bible into everyday languages. This effort made the Scriptures more accessible to ordinary people and questioned the Catholic Church's traditional control over interpreting the Bible and its authority.<sup>63</sup> The Luther Bible (1534) translated Phoebe's title as "Dienerin" ("female servant"), omitting her official role.<sup>64</sup> The Geneva Bible (1560) and the King James Version (1611) consistently translated αδελφοι as "brethren," linguistically excluding women.<sup>65</sup> On the same note, King James Translation perpetuated patterns of marginalising women. Συνεργος was translated as "helper," which undermines the egalitarian nuance of "co-worker."<sup>66</sup> Προστατις was translated as "succourer," which stripped Phoebe of her role as patron.<sup>67</sup> Lastly, Modern Translations, such as the New International Version (NIV), changed the word "brothers" to "brothers and sisters" αδελφοι and identified Junia as female. The English Standard Version (ESV) kept gender-specific language reflecting complementarian theological views. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) consistently includes women αδελφοι as "brothers and sisters," Phoebe as "deacon," and Junia as a female apostle.<sup>68</sup> Translation choices often reflect ecclesiastical bias rather than linguistic accuracy, reinforcing patriarchal theology.

## 9. Comparative Theological Reflection: Traditions and Interpretations

Traditionally, the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox, Protestants, Pentecostal, and Charismatic Movements have shown

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<sup>63</sup> Charles E. Hill, Ryan Matthew Reeves, and Justin S. Holcomb, *Know How We Got Our Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 118.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon A. Jensen, *Experiencing Gospel: The History and Creativity of Martin Luther's 1534 Bible Project* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2023), 129.

<sup>65</sup> *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Peabody, MA, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 107.

<sup>66</sup> Leland Ryken, *The ESV and the English Bible Legacy* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2011), 81.

<sup>67</sup> Ryken, *The ESV and the English Bible Legacy*, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Terry L. Cross, *Serving the People of God's Presence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 151.

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diverse perspectives on handling the gendered terms. For Roman Catholics, male dominance is valued. It supported male-only ordination, relying on interpretations of Paul that view hierarchy as the norm (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:12). However, recent Catholic scholarship has acknowledged Junia's apostleship and Phoebe's role as a deacon, sparking debate over whether women should be ordained as deacons.<sup>69</sup> Eastern Orthodox, on the other hand, emphasises a connection with early church traditions. Although the priesthood is still restricted to men, there is historical evidence of female deacons in Byzantine liturgy.<sup>70</sup> Today, debates focus on restoring this practice. Protestant traditions frequently adopt inclusive translations, citing Pauline evidence to support women's ordination and leadership.<sup>71</sup> Evangelicals prefer translations like the ESV, which keep male-focused renderings, reinforcing limits on women's authority.<sup>72</sup> The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements have historically been characterised by a complex relationship with gender roles, particularly concerning women's leadership. While these movements often espouse egalitarian principles, practical and cultural barriers frequently hinder women's full participation in leadership roles.<sup>73</sup> This dynamic is evident across various contexts, including Africa, the Americas, and Asia, where local cultural norms and economic factors significantly influence women's opportunities for leadership within these religious frameworks.<sup>74</sup> These traditions often prioritise the Spirit's gifting over hierarchical structures. Women's leadership is more easily accepted, though translation debates continue. Essentially, interpretations of Pauline terms directly influence views on women's ordination. Traditions prioritising linguistic and historical accuracy tend to support

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<sup>69</sup> Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 61.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A Storm of Images* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 202.

<sup>71</sup> Boyett, *Pocket Guide to the Bible*, 32-36.

<sup>72</sup> Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> Naomi Haynes, *Moving by the Spirit*, 1st ed. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 133.

<sup>74</sup> Dale T. Irvin and Scott Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement: Volume II: Modern Christianity from 1454-1800* (Maryknoll, NK: Orbis Books, 2012), 59.

women's leadership, while those focusing on a dogmatic view often oppose it.<sup>75</sup>

### 10. Global Perspectives and Variations

Women's experiences in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements vary significantly across cultural contexts. In Latin America, for example, the rise of Pentecostalism has transformed the religious landscape, yet women still face challenges in attaining leadership roles due to entrenched patriarchal structures.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the growth of independent and neo-Pentecostal churches has sometimes led to more inclusive practices, allowing women to assume leadership roles previously inaccessible to them.<sup>77</sup> Both opportunities and challenges mark the role of women in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. While these movements have the potential to empower women and provide avenues for leadership, economic, social, and theological barriers often limit their full participation. Understanding these dynamics requires a nuanced approach that considers local cultural contexts, economic realities, and the evolving interpretations of gender roles within these vibrant religious movements.

### 11. Hermeneutical Application

Exploring gendered terms in the Book of Romans draws on insights from hermeneutical approaches, such as feminist perspectives, linguistic analysis, and contextual considerations.<sup>78</sup> This response outlines key concepts and methodologies relevant to the faithful translation and application of gendered terms in Romans. Though this study does not support feminist hermeneutical principles, some of its elements shed light on the translation of gendered terms in the book of Romans by emphasising women's experiences and voices. This approach is characterised by two primary stances: the

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<sup>75</sup> Sonja Thomas et al., *Privileged Minorities* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018), 158.

<sup>76</sup> Haynes, *Moving by the Spirit*, 134.

<sup>77</sup> Oleg Dik, *Realness through Mediating Body*, 1st ed. (Göttingen, Germany: V&R Unipress, 2017), 30.

<sup>78</sup> Susanne M. DeCrane, *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 16.

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hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of retrieval. The former interrogates how texts may perpetuate oppression or marginalise women's voices, while the latter seeks to recover and highlight these voices within the text.<sup>79</sup> For instance, Romans 8:13, which contains rich feminine imagery, can be examined through these lenses to uncover deeper meanings that resonate with contemporary women's experiences.<sup>80</sup> The multiplicity of feminist hermeneutical approaches underscores the complexity of interpreting Romans. Scholars like Phyllis Trible have identified trends in feminist biblical scholarship that focus on observing oppressive texts, recovering neglected women, and telling women's stories.<sup>81</sup> This diversity allows for a more nuanced understanding of how gendered terms function within the text and how they can be translated and applied to honour both the original context and contemporary realities. This study uses the hermeneutical view that considers gender in its the linguistic context which brings in an accurate translation and interpretation. The original Greek language contains nuances that may not be fully captured in modern translations. For example, the term *καταλλαγή* (reconciliation) in Romans 5:11 carries specific connotations that reflect the relational dynamics between God and humanity.<sup>82</sup> A careful analysis of such terms, considering their grammatical and contextual implications, is essential for faithful translation. Moreover, the interplay between language and culture necessitates that translators be aware of how gendered terms may be perceived differently across cultures. This awareness can help avoid lexical fallacies, where individual words are over-interpreted without considering their broader linguistic context.<sup>83</sup> By engaging with the linguistic system of the original text, translators can better discern the intended meanings and implications of gendered terms. Furthermore, Contextual hermeneutics emphasises the importance of situating biblical texts within their historical and cultural contexts while considering

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<sup>79</sup> Bowens et al., *Preaching Romans from Here*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 57.

<sup>83</sup> Porter, *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching*, 58.

contemporary applications. This approach recognises that sacred texts are living documents that must be reinterpreted to remain relevant in modern society.<sup>84</sup> For instance, the ethical implications of gendered terms in Romans can be re-examined in light of current discussions on gender equality and justice. Engaging with the specific cultural contexts of the audience interpreting the text is essential in developing a contextual hermeneutic.<sup>85</sup> This includes acknowledging the presuppositions and experiences of interpreters, particularly women, who may have historically been marginalised in theological discussions.<sup>86</sup> By fostering a dialogue between the ancient text and contemporary contexts, interpreters can uncover new insights and applications that resonate with today's issues. The faithful translation and praxis of gendered terms in the Book of Romans require a comprehensive hermeneutical approach that integrates feminist perspectives, linguistic analysis, and contextual considerations. Scholars can critically engage with the text while honouring women's voices throughout history by employing a hermeneutics of suspicion and retrieval.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, attention to the linguistic nuances of the original Greek and the cultural contexts of both the text and its interpreters can lead to more meaningful and relevant applications of Romans in contemporary faith communities.<sup>88</sup> This multifaceted approach enriches our understanding of the text and contributes to ongoing discussions about gender and justice within the church and society.<sup>89</sup>

## 12. Conclusion

This study presents a philological and historical-biblical analysis of gendered terms in Romans 16, showing how Paul used words

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<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth M. Bucar, *Creative Conformity* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 107.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth Mtata and Eve-Marie Becker, *Pauline Hermeneutics*, 1st ed. (Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 163.

<sup>86</sup> Anna Sui Hluan, *"Silence" in Translation* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2022), 73.

<sup>87</sup> Mtata and Becker, *Pauline Hermeneutics*, 164.

<sup>88</sup> Louise Heldgaard Bylund et al., *Nordic Interpretations of the New Testament*, 1st ed. (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 49.

<sup>89</sup> DeCrane, *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good*, 17.

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διακονος, αποστολος, συνεργος, προστατις, and Αδελφοι in ways consistent with Greco-Roman ideas of female leadership. Far from portraying women as marginal figures, Paul's language in the book of Romans reflects their recognised authority as deacons, apostles, co-workers, siblings in faith, and patrons. Historical evidence from inscriptions, archaeology, and Greco-Roman practices shows women often held key roles in religious and civic life. Paul's recognition of female leaders like Phoebe and Junia reflected his cultural context in the book of Romans. Later translations, especially in the Vulgate, Reformation Bibles, and the King James Version, downplayed these roles, reflecting a patriarchal bias. Recent translations, such as the NRSV, ESV, and CSB, have started to restore the original inclusivity.

Across Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions, theological interpretations reveal that translation decisions directly impact church practices, particularly in debates over women's ordination and leadership. Traditions that emphasise linguistic accuracy and historical context support women's authority, whereas those that favour restrictive translations continue to reinforce exclusion. From a hermeneutical perspective, this study supports translation strategies that prioritise staying true to Paul's original intent in the book of Romans, transparency in word meanings, and consideration of historical context. Faithful translation goes beyond an academic exercise; it has theological implications, shaping the church's life and witness today. By reclaiming Paul's original recognition of women's leadership, modern-day communities can rediscover a vision of inclusivity and justice that was core to the earliest Christian gatherings. Ultimately, accurately translating and understanding Paul's gendered terms in the book of Romans is crucial for scholarly accuracy and reinvigorating the church's dedication to equality, authenticity, and empowering all believers through the Holy Spirit.