“Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow countrymen and comrades in captivity, who are eminent among the apostles and were Christians before I was” (Rom. 16:7). Few of us have probably paused over this verse among the list of greetings Paul puts at the end of the Epistle to the Romans. Among those who obviously did was the scribe who substituted “Junias,” a man’s name, for the female “Junia.” How could a woman be an apostle, our shocked scribe probably asked? Of course, apostolos, literally “one who is sent,” is used so variously in its eighty appearances in the New Testament that it is difficult to speak of a single biblical meaning for the word. In general, we can distinguish generic uses (anyone who is sent: e.g., 2 Cor. 8:23, Phil. 2:25, Heb. 3:1) from the semi-technical sense of a group of leaders vested with some authority in the community. While the Synoptic Gospels, especially Luke (see, e.g., Lk. 6:13, 9:10, 17:5, 22:14), tend to use the term of the original twelve of Jesus’s followers, John does not know this usage. We might think that Paul barged his way into the club in his claim, “I am the least of the apostles” (Rom. 15:9; see Rom. 1:1, 11:13; 1 Cor. 1:1, 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; etc.), but he was willing to see others besides the twelve and himself as apostles, as his reference to the otherwise unknown Andronicus and Junia demonstrate. In Hebrews 3:1 Jesus himself is described as “the apostle and high priest of our confession.”

As the early Christian church developed the notion of a line, or succession, of leaders, the successors of the apostles came to be restricted to the episcopal office, a long and complex development not discussed here,
since it has often been written about.\textsuperscript{3} What we should remember, though, is that the institutional and official sense of apostle never totally cancelled out the functional, more charismatic, sense of apostle as one called by Christ and sent out to spread the gospel, as we can see from the way in which certain missionaries came to be hailed as apostles, for example, Patrick the ‘Apostle of the Irish,’ Ansgar, the ‘Apostle of the North,’ and Cyril and Methodius, the ‘Apostles of the Slavs.’ This charismatic understanding of \textit{apostolus} might be thought of as merely metaphorical, and it was certainly secondary to the status of the twelve and their successors, but it is interesting to note that even the theological understanding of apostle, as set forth, for example, by Thomas Aquinas, made room for the special charisms given to the original twelve, which might, by extension, be granted to others through grace. Thomas noted the infused knowledge and wisdom given the twelve apostles for their mission to convert the world. “The apostles,” Thomas says, “had all the knowledge necessary to convert the world.”\textsuperscript{4} That means, he explains elsewhere, that “God gave the apostles knowledge of scripture and of all the languages men are able to acquire by study or custom, although not as perfectly.”\textsuperscript{5} Although Thomas does not explicitly discuss the issue, he gives no reason why those called to continue the work of conversion might not also be accorded special graces (\textit{gratiae gratis datae}) to aid them in spreading the gospel.

Both the institutional sense of \textit{apostolus} enshrined in the twelve and their episcopal successors (\textit{viri apostolici}), as well as the charismatic sense of later apostles as missionaries endowed with special knowledge to preach and convert the world, were for the most part assigned to men, so we can see why the unknown scribe decided to change Junia to Junias. Given that the twelve and their missionary successors were men, how could a woman be an apostle? Only with great difficulty, one supposes! There was, however, a tradition of female apostles in the history of the church that has all-too-often been neglected. It is worth exploring one aspect of this story, concentrating on the lives, claims, and fates of two mystical female apostles: Catherine of Siena in fourteenth-century Italy and Jeanne Guyon in seventeenth-century France.


\textsuperscript{4} Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa theologiae} (STh), IaI1ae, q. 176, a. 1, ad 1; cf. IaI1ae, q. 106, a. 4, ad 2.

\textsuperscript{5} STh IaI1ae, q. 51, a. 4c.