

A BOOK REVIEW  
“WOMEN AND THE GENDER OF GOD”

May 27, 2025

**TITLE OF BOOK:** “Women and the Gender of God”

**AUTHOR:** Amy Peeler, PhD, who is the Associate Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and is Associate Rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Geneva, Illinois. She has, among other scholarly efforts, made a lifetime study of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, and has authored *You Are My Son: The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, and has co-authored, with Patrick Gray, *Of Hebrews: An Introduction and Study Guide*, and has authored the massive work (which this Reviewer has also Reviewed by a Review which appears on the TEIMissouri Website), *Hebrews, as a part of the Commentaries for Christian Formation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2024).

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**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

I, Your Reviewer, have struggled with even starting this Review. I have so struggled not because this Book of Dr. Peeler isn’t a wonderful Book, because it isn’t just wonderful, it is a sensational, paradigm shifting Book. My struggles are caused by my feelings of inadequacy when it comes to even attempting to summarize for you, Dear Reader, the contents of this Book in such a way as will induce you, not just to acquire it and read it, but to read it, and (as I have done) re-read it and study it several times, and meditate on its contents and Dr. Peeler’s conclusions, conclusions which, if seriously considered will lift the “scales from the eyes” (to borrow a passage about Paul in Acts) of any Reader who continues to be of the belief or opinion that women are, by reason of their gender, somehow precluded from certain positions or roles in Christian Ministry. I HOPE AND PRAY THAT YOU, DEAR READER, WILL ACQUIRE, READ, RE-READ, STUDY AND MEDITATE ON THIS HUGELY IMPORTANT BOOK. I hope that this Review will at least stimulate your interest in doing so. So, no, my struggles with starting this Review arise out of my feelings that I, who am not a seminary trained theologian but rather am trained as an engineer and lawyer who has had all of his professional experience in the practice of law, will, somehow, dissuade the individuals who should read and study this book, Pastors, Church Elders and Leaders and Christian Teachers, from doing so.

So, Dear Reader, if you don’t like reading Book Reviews or don’t trust my non-seminary theological training, then just stop here and do what you should do, Acquire, Read, Re-Read, Study and Meditate on this marvelous book by a marvelous scholar, theologian, clergy member and teacher. I respectfully submit that doing so will either completely reinforce your view that properly trained, educated, skilled, effective and called by God to do so, should be in positions of complete equality with men in the holding of all positions and the performance of all roles in Christian Ministry, or, if you have a contrary view, will cause a complete paradigm shift in your views of the proper roles for women in Christian Ministry.

Our Author, Dr. Peeler, has set forth her conclusions and her arguments for those conclusions in such Scholarly, Well Researched and Documented fashion, and in such an extended fashion as to make it difficult, not just to Review this Book but also to even begin to understand and absorb its contents in one sitting. Like any academic work, this Book is not for beginners. It is not for those who want to just pick it up and quickly read it. It is not an Easy Read. You, Dear Reader, will have to work at it, when it comes to this Book, but if you do so you will be hugely benefitted by your efforts. Now, please stick with me as I

deviate from my normal Book Review Format, and advise you of some of my initial thoughts about this Book, and my personal and theological motivations for trying to prepare this difficult Review.

### **SOME PERSONAL, INITIAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR THIS REVIEW**

I have personally struggled, both from a standpoint of a personal bias which I will disclose, and from a sense of theological puzzlement about the limitations which are placed on the roles of ministry in some of our denominations and churches. While I recognize and concede that the primary role of our churches is to bring people to Christ and to a degree of maturity in Christ, and that, in certain cultures or situations it might be disruptive to the unity of a church or congregation to place a woman in some ministry roles, I have wondered over statements to the effect that Scripture, the Bible (which obviously governs over all) or some other source of Theological Revelation dictates that the roles of women in ministry must be restricted because of their gender. Obviously, if the Bible or the Truth of True Theology requires that a man serve in some positions such as Senior Pastor, Preacher from the Pulpit or member of the Board of Elders, then I don't want to be party to some church which has contrary views. My questions, therefore, is whether the Bible or sound Theology, from whatever the source of God's revelation might be, does require the males, men, serve in certain roles of ministry and that women are precluded from those roles by reason of their gender. This Book by our Author, Dr. Amy Peeler, helps me, and I submit that it will help you, in wrestling with these issues. So, I am going to disclose my personal biases and the results of my studies on the so-called "Women's Issue" before I go forward with this Review.

**A) PERSONAL BIAS:** You, Dear Reader, are entitled to know from whence I come in my Review of Dr. Peeler's Book. I am an 83-year old male. I grew up in a family, and social culture which were, at best, patriarchal, and at worst misogynistic. I was raised in the Roman Catholic Faith, a wonderful faith for which I have huge respect, but a faith which, obviously, when it comes to the roles of women, is patriarchal as women may not be ordained as priests. My father was a wonderful man and father, and he spoke and taught with and almost comical sincerity that men should run the family (as, in my judgment, it was my mother which was the glue of the family), and he was proud in asserting that my mother had no idea about the family's financial situation, and that, if allowed to do so, women could spend a family into bankruptcy. All of my engineering and law professors, save one wonderful exception, were male. My initial professional superiors and mentors were all male. There was only one female in my Law School class, and none in my engineering classes. When, during my early years of law practice, women lawyers started to come on the scene, I, like many of my male contemporaries, were very resistant to females ascending among the ranks of lawyers, much less in the judiciary. I had the privilege of belonging to what was known as the "Round Table", a collection of men from the business world, and from the academic and athletic world of the University of Missouri. We met, daily, for lunch and conversation. One of our older members was a retired Circuit Court Judge, and he would, at least monthly, wax eloquently upon his theory that all of the problems of this country began with Women's Suffrage. Obviously, none of the priests in our parish were women. There weren't even any female "alter persons". (I was an Alter Boy, and even became a Senior Alter Boy.) So, looking back at my early years, even years through my 40s, I have to honestly admit that I was highly patriarchal if not in misogynistic in my views. Those views changed, dramatically, when I saw women, in large numbers, come into the roles of lawyers and the judiciary. I observed just how talented and effective and accomplished they were and are in these roles. Of course, one would have to be completely

blind if he or she did not observe just how accomplished women are today in our culture, in roles of corporate CEOs, Medical Doctors, Veterinarians, Dentists, Political Leaders, Pilots, the military, the highest levels of the judiciary (women serve admirably on the U.S. Supreme Court, and make up the majority of the members of the Missouri Supreme Court (the first female Chief Justice is a good friend and next door neighbor)) and in virtually every aspect of human endeavor. So, my views, which are driven by personal observations and experiences have caused me to question, severely question, any view that women are, by reason of their gender, somehow of a lesser class when it comes to occupying certain positions (e.g. Senior Pastor or Pastor or Elder) in any Christian Church, or performing certain roles in any such church (e.g. Preaching from the Pulpit or Teaching men or a mixed group, or teaching without the assistance of a man). So, upfront, my personal views are that any such view is antiquated and just plain wrong. So, now I have disclosed my personal bias in my assembly of this Review and one of the reasons why I consider this Book to be of such huge importance.

- B) PERSONAL SCHOLARSHIP:** In view of my strong bias as described in A) above, I have become intensely interested in trying to understand the reasons why some Christian denominations and churches take a strong position that women, no matter how qualified, may not occupy any positions of Senior Leadership or of a Senior Pastoral standing. Being raised in the Roman Catholic faith, a faith for which I have huge respect, I always assumed that this position has been taken because of the long-standing Catholic Tradition, if you will, that women may not be ordained as priests. However, upon further study I have noted that some Protestant Denominations (e.g. the Southern Baptist Conventions) and some individual, evangelical churches (including at some in my hometown, Columbia, Missouri), hold this position against women in leadership and senior positions because, in their view, Scripture, the Bible bars participation by women in these roles. While there are other Bible passages or pericopes which they claim support their position, the primary pericope is the one of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, a pericope which I assume is well known to you, Dear Reader. I embarked on a long process of seeking to exegete that pericope and other relevant passages. As a result, I prepared an extended paper entitled *“Are Women Barred by Scripture From Occupying Certain Positions or Performing Certain Roles in Christian Ministry, Solely by Reason of Their Gender?”*. That paper now appears in the TEIMissouri Website under the indexed title of *“Dan’s Position on Women in Ministry.”* In the 85 pages of that paper (yes, it is too long) I cited and summarized a host of literary works which deal with the “Women Subject”, if you will, and performed my own hermeneutical analysis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and other relevant Scriptural passages, and came to the conclusion, of which I am absolutely persuaded, that Scripture, the Bible does not bar women, solely by reason of their gender, from holding or participating in any roles of Christian Ministry, and that to so bar them is Not Biblical. In fact, I would argue that a position that these passages and pericopes, properly exegeted, and analyzed (as I believe I have done in that paper) do not stand for the proposition that women are, forever and in every church, Scripturally- barred from occupying any position or performing any role in Christian Ministry.
- C) PERSONAL PUZZLEMENT:** If I am correct in my analysis and conclusions described in my paper discussed in B) above, then what possible causes or reasons exist for the strong positions taken by some Christian Denominations and churches against the participation of women in leadership roles (such as that of an elder) and Senior Positions? I am puzzled by this fact. I am even more puzzled by the fact that some of our churches seem to agree with my analysis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and allow women to perform certain roles from which that pericope, when read at what I call “just plain reading face value”, would seem to clearly bar them from performing (e.g. publicly preaching a sermon or message from the pulpit), but still bar them from holding any Senior Pastoral position or occupying any position of leadership, such as that

of a church elder. I have, in my paper referred to in B) above, cited at length, a brilliant sermon given by a pastor of a Kansas City Church in which he completely dissects 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and concludes that it does not bar women's participation in any role of ministry, and then makes, what is for me, a highly puzzling statement that "We ask that our church's tradition of male leadership be respected." That church has no women on its Board of Elders, and will allow none to be on that Board. So, if the bars of women's participation are not those required by Scripture, how do we account for (or at least how can I account for) the barring or limitation of women's Christian Ministerial roles? Certainly the "Tradition" of each denomination or congregation could play a role in this limitation placed upon able, gifted and God called women. Obviously, the Roman Catholic Church has such a Tradition. Perhaps some denominations or congregations also have such a Tradition. Certainly, Tradition is to be respected, and if ignoring a Tradition for a male Senior Pastor or male participation in leadership would cause disruption or lack of unity in a church or its gatherings, then, as I argue in my paper, the Bible might then require or suggest that a "go slow, educational approach" towards women's roles is appropriate. I concede that Unity was a key concern of the apostle Paul, and that Unity and the avoidance of Disruptions are to be preserved. However, even assuming this to be the case, one has to ask the question about the underlying source or support for the Tradition limiting women's roles if it is not the Bible. Another possible source (other than the Bible or Tradition) for the limitation of women's roles in ministry might lie in the perceptions that men are better leaders, or are somehow more able to lead than are women. Surely, surely this perception has been completely shattered by current day experiences, at least in Western Countries, where highly successful women leaders abound, and have served admirably. So, where do we go to look for the "back up source" if you will for any position or Tradition that the roles of women must, solely by reason of their gender, be limited or constrained in Christian Ministry?

**D) A PROBABLE ANSWER:** Now you, Dear Reader, are probably wondering what does all of my personal musings described in A) and B) above have to do with Dr. Amy Peeler's Book which is the subject of this Review. In my judgment, she has hit upon the fact that the Beliefs or Perceptions held by some (if not in fact many) Christian Denominations and Churches and Christian individuals believe or think that: 1) God the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, is either male or possesses traits of nature or character which are more like a male than a female, and 2) Jesus, the perfect revelation of God, was, obviously, a male, and 3) males and only males can, therefore, properly represent Christians before God and can properly advocate for them before God and intercede for them before God. Therefore, such Denominations or Churches conclude and dictate that only males can be ordained as priests or members of the clergy or can occupy Senior Positions in Christian Ministry or positions in church leadership. These are positions which our author, Dr. Peeler, identifies and then, with remarkable scholarly and Biblical skills and brilliant writing, totally refutes in this wonderful book.

#### **WHAT IS THE AUTHOR DOING WITH WHAT THE AUTHOR IS SAYING?**

Our Author, Dr. Amy Peeler, is a hugely gifted author and teacher and clergy member. I am none of these things. It is, therefore, a frightening and humbling experience for me to even try to encapsulate the essence of her messages, as provided by this Book. That said, it is my duty to try to do so. So, in my words, not hers, the overall messages of this Book are as follows:

*“Women are precluded from holding certain positions in ministry, including as members of the ordained clergy, because, Christian Teaching that God is without gender notwithstanding, God is perceived as exhibiting characteristics which are more male than female, and because God’s Perfect Revelation of God is in the person of Jesus Christ, who was male. Therefore, only males can properly represent and intercede for humanity before God. However, proper exegesis of Scripture, and the revelations of who God is and who Jesus is and was, when read and considered through the lens of the Incarnation, refute such perceptions and reveal that God is not male, and that Jesus was a male like no other and can represent and intercede for all humans, male and female, in that He, Jesus, had no father, but rather was conceived by the creative act of God, acting through Holy Spirit, who overshadowed Mary and caused her to conceive without any participation by a male father and without any sexual act, and caused Mary to give birth to Jesus, whose flesh, whose human flesh was that of a Woman, a Jewish Woman, Mary. Jesus, the most Perfect Revelation of God, was/is, therefore, a male who was conceived and born without a human father and who was conceived without participation by any male, through a truly virgin birth, and who was born and nourished and cared for by a Woman, Mary, and whose human flesh came solely from a woman, Mary. Jesus was a male, but his human flesh came solely from a woman, Mary. Jesus was/is, therefore, a male like no other male in that he had no human father and no participation in his conception or birth by a male, and in that his flesh was/is that of a woman. Therefore, Jesus, as the Perfect Revelation of God, refutes the belief that God is male or is more male than female, and that only males can occupy positions in Christian Ministry. Furthermore, Scripture clearly stands for the positions that Mary was not just a vessel for God but was also respected by God, and was not just a mother but was also a proclaimer of God, and that Mary, as depicted in Scripture, indicates that Women are held in esteem by God and may perform any and all roles in Ministry.”*

This is my very inadequate summary of what the Author is saying with what she is doing with this Book. Let me make a few additional observations about this Wonderful (at least in my view, hugely important) Book, as follows:

- A) GOD’S CHOICE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH: God did not have to have Jesus, the Messiah, come into this world in the manner in which God chose to have this come to pass. God chose the manner for the conception and birth of Jesus, because God wanted Jesus to be the perfect Revelation of Who God is, and to be both fully human, including being born of a human mother, and fully God, fully divine. So, God chose Mary to be the vessel who would give birth to Jesus, and caused her to become pregnant without the benefit of participation by a human male or any sexual act, but rather through the creative act of God, acting through the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed Mary, all as described in the birth narratives of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, primarily Luke.
- B) RELIABILITY OF THE RECOUNTING OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH: While some have argued that the story of the Virgin Birth was adapted from the stories of the conceiving and births of some of the mythical (if you will) deities, the fact that the birth narratives of the Gospels describe a virgin birth is indicative of the fact that the virgin conception of Jesus truthfully and factually occurred because the Evangelists, who described this event, took a huge risk in doing so. In doing so they risked the possibility that such virgin birth event could be compared to (or even came from) the mythical stories about the conceiving of some of the demigods. They took this risk because their narratives were true. Furthermore, they contrasted the event of the conception of Jesus with the recounting of the stories of the acts of the gods, many of whom forced their way upon the mothers of the demigods. That Jesus was conceived through a virgin birth, without any participation by a male father, but rather through the creative act of God and the participation of a human mother, was essential to God’s Revelation of God,

through Jesus, as a male, but as a male with the flesh of a woman, thereby establishing Jesus Christ as the perfect representative and intervenor for all humans, male and female

- C) ANNUNCIATION: The Biblical recounting of the Annunciation (the selection of Mary and the conversations with Mary of God's representative, the Arch Angel Gabriel, clearly indicate that Mary, by her own free and considered choice, freely agreed, with full knowledge of all of the risks and problems, to become the bearer and mother of Jesus. Any thought that Mary was somehow taken advantage of, or had her role thrust upon her, or was subject to an abusive relationship leading to her pregnancy is refuted by the accounts of the evangelists, particularly Luke. Mary was respected by God. Mary joyfully accepted her role and her song, the Magnificat, clearly provides that such was the case.
- D) INCARNATION: The Incarnation, the coming of God into this world as a human person through the birth and ministry of Jesus, and the manner in which it came to be, are the lens through which Scripture and the Perfect Revelation of God in Jesus should be interpreted in seeking to understand the issues relating to "the Gender of God" if you will. As our Author states at page 121 of her Book: "The incarnation, and particularly the way in which it came to be, should impact everything—Christology, theology, and anthropology, including Christianity's view of women.". Christ came into this world without a human father, through the creative act of God, and, as a fully human person He derived his human flesh from a human mother, Mary. He had no father, but he had a human mother and had human flesh from a human mother. One can rightly say that, following the Ascension, Jesus, with the human flesh of a Jewish woman, sits with the Father, and can and does properly represent and intercede for all humans, male and female. He is a male like no other male. He has no human father, and takes all of his flesh from that of a woman. To, therefore, say that Jesus, as a male human, somehow reveals that God is more male than female or possesses more male than female characteristics, is to make a statement which, in view of the Incarnation and the manner in which it came to be, is an erroneous statement. To say that the fact that Jesus was male somehow reveals that only males can properly represent and intercede for humans with God is to make a statement which, in view of the Incarnation and the manner it came to be, is an erroneous statement.
- E) IMPORTANCE OF INCARNATION: Our Author attaches huge importance to the Incarnation and the manner in which it came to be. In that respect, this Book was a real eye opener for me.
- F) MARY AS MOTHER, NURTERER AND PROCLAIMER OF JESUS: Our Author carefully analyzes the somewhat sparse references to Mary in Scripture. She concludes that Mary was not just a vessel for bringing Jesus into this world, but was also, clearly, His mother in every respect, and that, in this role, she bore Him and cared for Him, and with Joseph, nurtured Him and Taught Him, just as any human mother would do. God, therefore, chose to come into this world, and to be mothered by a human mother and to grow up like a human child. In our Author's view, the statement in Luke 2:52 that "Jesus *grew* in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and humanity" is a significant, in that it indicates that Jesus, God, "*grew*", like a human child, with the benefit of the nurturing and care of human parents. The Second Temple visit, which occurred after Jesus had failed to accompany folks returning home after a feast causing Mary and Joseph, with huge concerns, to search 3 days for Him, is also informative. There Mary said to Jesus "Child why did you do us this way". (Luke 2:49) Jesus responded "Why were you seeking me? Did you not know that I needed to be in my Father's house". However, the Gospel indicates that Jesus then descended from the Temple and returned with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. It was after this event that Luke indicates that Jesus "*grew*" in wisdom and stature. The narrative of the Wedding at

Canaan, where Jesus turned water into wine, His first sign, describes a relationship between Jesus, as an adult, with Mary, wherein it appears that Mary had full knowledge or at least some knowledge as to just who Jesus was, and wherein Jesus and Mary exhibited full, mutual respect. So, the Gospels indicate that Mary was the mother of Jesus in all of the same ways in which a human mother mothers her children. The Magnificat, Mary's presence in the Upper Room when the Apostles were gathering after the Ascension (Acts. 1:14) and when a replacement for Judas was selected, and, her likely presence at the Pentecost event, all are indicative of a ministry role for Mary as a proclaimer of Jesus and the Gospel. Mary's story, as told by the Gospels and the Book of Acts, therefore, is a clear indication that God respects women and holds them in esteem, and that they should be viewed in the same way men are viewed when it comes to identifying their roles in Christian ministry.

- G) GOD AS FATHER: While God is not male, and does not possess characteristics which are more male than female, it is wholly appropriate to refer to the First Portion of the Trinity, as "Father", because Jesus referred to God as Father. God does act towards us as a personal, loving, nurturing, supporting parent, and it is fully appropriate for us to refer to God as Father, but not because God is male, like a human Father. In her Appendix in her Book, our Author also describes all of the reasons why God is a Good Father, a personal, living, nurturing and helping Father.

The above statements inadequately incapsulate the Author's positions and her extensive, well documented, Scripturally supported and well thought out positions. I have to refer you to her Book in order for you to gain much better understanding of her positions and arguments in support of these positions. I would also refer you to her lecture which was given at TEI (The Theological Education Initiative) in Columbia, Missouri, on April 23, 2025. That lecture can be viewed and heard on the TEIMissouri Website or on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, etc. Just search for TEIMissouri. You can also refer to [teimissouri.org](http://teimissouri.org). Please go and see and listen to Amy Peeler's lecture. I will most respectfully submit that if you do so you will be so deeply impressed by her wisdom, knowledge and teaching and communication abilities as to conclude that to take a position that would deny women like her of any position in Christian Ministry, solely because they are women is to take a position which, quite simply, cannot be supported.

### **HOW TO READ THIS BOOK**

I always urge my readers that they should read the entire Book. That is the case here. However, I have to confess that this Book is not an easy read. It is not what I would call, without any desire to denigrate any good Christian book, "an easy read, theological or Christian Book." It is not a Book for beginning Christians. It is not a book for anyone who does not have a deep desire to delve deeply into Christian theology. It is not a book for someone who is closed minded on the "Women's Issue", who firmly believes that, for whatever reason, Scripture, Tradition, Experience or whatever, Women may not occupy certain roles in Christian Ministry and who would say "That is my position and I am sticking with it, don't talk to me about it". No, this is a Book for a Serious Reader, one who has a deep interest in the "Women In Ministry" issue, and who is willing to engage in deep study about that issue. Furthermore, keeping in mind the fact that each of you is a very busy person, I can suggest that the Author's *Introduction* for this Book, as it appears at the beginning of this Book, is outstanding. It is one of the best Introductions which I have seen. If you read that Introduction, you will be advised, up front, and in detail, about what the Author is saying in this Book, and what her positions, are, and about the order in which she will present those positions. That Introduction, and the Table of Contents, and the Conclusion beginning on Page 187

will give you excellent insights into the contents of this Book, which will enable you to then (or later) go in and read, in detail, specific parts of the Book which might be of interest to you.

### **SHOULD THIS BOOK BE IN THE TEI LIBRARY OR BE USED IN ANY TEI/ECLI CLASS**

This Book should absolutely be in the TEI library, and, in my view, in the library of any Christian Pastor, Teacher or Serious Christian Student. With respect to using this Book for a class, and fully understanding that, at least for some Pastors and churches, the Women's Issue is a highly sensitive and possibly controversial issue, my suggestion would be that (as much as I hate the term, Trigger Warning) the information about the Class should fully disclose that it is a Class in which all issues about the Proper Roles of Women in all parts of Christian Ministry will be openly and fully discussed, hopefully in a manner in which the views and positions of all participants are given full respect and can be fully expressed.

### **PERSONAL APOLOGY**

I understand that my views which are expressed in this Review might be offensive to some of you Readers who come from Faith Traditions which firmly believe that the roles of women in ministry must be restricted because of Scripture, or Tradition or for some other causes. I hope that I made it clear in my paper which is discussed above in this Review that, while I disagree with those views, I respect your views. I am more than willing to discuss them. As I noted above, and as I have noted in my paper, the proclaiming of the Gospel and bringing people to Christ and to Maturity in Christ, and to preserving the Unity of, and avoiding Disruptions in any Christian Gathering or congregation, must, as the Apostle Paul and other Epistle writers urged, be given primacy in any church. It is just my view, as stated and argued for in my 85 page paper discussed above, that Scripture, the Bible, does not stand for the proposition that the roles of Women in Christian Ministry are, forever, everywhere in every church restricted solely by reason of their gender, and that, in view of this Book we have just reviewed, those roles are not restricted because God is seen as being male or as possessing more male characteristics than female characteristics or because Jesus was a male. We can, most certainly, debate those positions.

Thank You!

Dan Simon