

Without implying that they are the only or even the most important things I would want to say about Sarah Heaner Lancaster's *Women and the Authority of Scripture: A Narrative Approach*, I want to make the following four comments:

1. Like her mentor, Charles Wood, Lancaster operates throughout with an essentially humanistic-idealistic conceptuality, whose theological appropriateness is, to say the least, questionable. Thus, for example, she speaks continually of such things as "Christian formation [*Bildung!*]," "growing in a saving relationship," and so on (173, 177, 178). The worst part of this, however, is that she is completely uncritical about it—revealing at no point that she has reflected on the appropriateness of her concepts sufficiently to have good reasons for using them instead of others.

2. Like other feminists and liberation theologians, Lancaster endorses the redefinition of "salvation," by, as she puts it, "adding [*sic!*] women's well-being in the world to concern for our ultimate end" (59). In this respect, also, she ignores the criticism of such a move explicit, for instance, in my distinction between "emancipation" and "redemption" as different but inseparable aspects of "liberation."

3. Like most theologians, Lancaster completely misses the point of the distinction between "appropriateness" and "credibility." This means, among other things, that she talks about "the authority of scripture" and "the authority of women (or women's experience)" without recognizing that, while the first may be relevant to deciding both the appropriateness and the credibility of Christian witness, the second can be relevant, at most, to deciding its credibility.

4. So far as I am able to tell, Lancaster's whole "narrative approach" is something of a red herring. Whether or not the Bible is to be construed as narrative, or a narrative (and there are, of course, the best of historical- and literary-critical reasons for *not* so construing it!), the "reformist feminist theology" for which she argues, both in general and with particular reference to the authority of scripture, can be—and has been!—adequately defended—e.g., by

Pamela Dickey Young. Far from making for a more adequate such defense, as she in effect claims, her narrative approach really saddles her with defending positions that are irrelevant to the main thing she seeks to establish.

(An interesting confirmation of this is her statement, "In their own ways and without explicitly using this terminology, both Bultmann and Frei identified the way in which the Bible exercises its authority appropriately, for Bultmann when it discloses to us authentic human existence in the light of God's love and for Frei when it portrays for us a world in which God is present through Jesus Christ" [10, n. 7].)

12 June 2002