

on this difficult question.

With regard to patronage relations, which I agree are of central importance to Paul's difficulties with the Corinthians, I believe Paul's role might be further clarified through the use of "broker" terminology. That is, precisely on the basis of bringing the Corinthians into the favor of his own Patron (God), he has become the Corinthians' patron, and deserves the respect and honor which accompany that role. In the Greco-Roman context, this respect derives not solely from being God's agent (the *shaliach*, clearly Paul's *self*-understanding from his Jewish background), but also God's "broker" (or mediator)—one whose benefaction is access to a great patron.

Witherington is commendably sensitive to honor and shame as primary values in the ancient Mediterranean world, but appears in his "closer look" section on honor to have swallowed too much of Malina's model. For example, Malina lays heavy stress on the agonistic nature of competition for honor—one person wins honor from another's loss. But Witherington elsewhere even quotes Plutarch's dictum that is "odious and vulgar" to "win applause from the humiliation of another" or to "cause another's disgrace to win glory for oneself," which clearly counts against Malina's one-sided emphasis on competition. This is not so much a criticism of Witherington as of his sources, and I would add that only his "closer look" is affected. His own work with the text is so well grounded in classical authors that the failings of those dependent on modern cultural-anthropological studies do not harm his work. I would also suggest that "shame" (as *aidōs*) is not strictly a woman's value, for persons of either gender are concerned about reputation. This "shame" rather manifests itself in different arenas (e.g., virginity for a woman, courage for a man). Here Witherington rightly notes that women can indeed aspire to honor not only through modesty but also through benefaction, and that the *ekklēsia* opens up still other avenues for women to achieve honor.

On balance, this is a very fine commentary and essential reading for any study of or sermon on the Corinthian letters. Pastors and seminarians will especially appreciate the very thoughtful hermeneutical suggestions appearing in concluding paragraphs or, more often, in footnotes, which challenge us in the church to weigh our ministers and ourselves by God's standards rather than by worldly criteria, and to examine how we, like the Corinthians, continue to function with the mindset of our society rather than the mind of Christ.

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Zurcher, Jean. *La Perfection chrétienne*. Lausanne: Editions Belles Rivières, 1993.
118 pp. n.p.

In this revision of an earlier writing, the author, a well-known Seventh-day Adventist educator and administrator, attempts to define the meaning of the word *perfection* primarily for ministers and laypeople of his church. First he considers the biblical evidence and then he devotes his attention to the concept in the writings of Ellen White.

The general impression can be summarized by one word: clarity. The organization is clear, the style is clear, the conclusions are clear, even the physical make-up of the book is clear. The brief summaries at the end of each section add greatly to the readability of the book. I must emphasize, however, that clarity is reached through selectivity and brevity rather than superficiality.

The conclusion of the discussion on the biblical passages is that perfection refers to a relationship rather than an ultimate, static, moral condition. We might say that the essence of perfection is singleness of loyalty rather than sinlessness. While in the OT the emphasis falls on the relationship with God, in the NT it broadens to the relationship with the neighbor, through which our relationship with God is affirmed. In both Testaments the purpose of the law is to clarify the characteristics of the bond. As is clear in the epistles of Paul, the concept also includes a very dynamic element. In Christ we are perfect, but the better we know him, the more we yearn to be truly like him and so we strive continually toward this goal.

Zurcher considers carefully the thorny problems raised by the passages in the epistles of John that seem to require absolute sinlessness. The author distinguishes between *sin* and *sins*. Sin is a condition; sins are acts and the two should never be confused. To understand those passages one should keep in mind those meanings. For John, to sin is to live in a state of rebellion against God and no one can claim to be a Christian who still is hostile to God. Thus Zurcher remains consistent with his essential thesis of perfection as relationship rather than the quality of acts and avoids the problems of the issues raised by the view that, in John, to be sinless means *not to continue* in sin.

One wonders why, especially in his discussion of the OT material, Zurcher does not refer to the covenant context of those writings. Humans such as Enoch, Abraham or David are perfect in the eyes of God, not because they are morally unimpeachable, which is certainly not the case, but because they are faultless in their attitude toward the covenant. Should not the NT texts also be understood in the context of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus? We are perfect insofar and as long as we bind our lives to the life of our Savior and live by his promises. Like Peter after his denial, we can boldly say, in spite of our falls, "Lord, you know that I love you!"

In the second part Zurcher considers three topics: Ellen White and Christian perfection; perfection as a privilege of human beings; character perfection possible only in Jesus Christ. He supports his interpretations with an abundance of primary material.

One cannot overemphasize the importance of character development for Ellen White. Within that concept she gives a progressive and moral dimension to perfection. As Zurcher shows, for her it is an endless quest, even through eternity. Thus even the most radical advocates of moral perfection must admit that it is never a completed thing. Our perfection is always relative to our stage of development.

One will wonder why Zurcher, who has emphasized so clearly in the first part that in Scripture perfection is bound to relationship, does not give direct consideration to that new moral tone that dominates in Ellen White's writings. Perfection for her is overwhelmingly moral perfection. This becomes especially

clear when Zurcher discusses her description of the last generation of Christians before the second coming of Christ. Survival at the climax of human history requires faultlessness, a logical implication, according to many Adventists, of the concept of the *investigative judgment*, or preadvent judgment, which by that time has been completed, thus ending Christ's intercessory ministry.

It is also difficult to understand why Zurcher does not mention Ellen White's Methodist roots. In many places her words have a very distinct Wesleyan tone. For her, however, perfection is not a second blessing, a gift at a specific time; it is the fruit of character development.

Zurcher warns his readers that the original terms in Hebrew and Greek are translated by many different words, thus making it very difficult to study the concept in a translation. In his book, however, Zurcher makes little effort to bring out what may be gained from the use of the biblical languages.

Zurcher's book can be highly recommended for its readability, its Bible-centeredness, and the author's insights. It provides its readers, even non-Adventist readers, a solid ground for personal reflection on this important topic.

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