

## **INTERPRETING 1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15 IN THE LIGHT OF CHURCH BUILDING AND PROBITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

So much has been said about church building in Nigeria, whether among the mainline churches, African Indigenous churches, or the new generation churches, especially in regard to accountability vis-à-vis attitudinal tendencies among the various builders, that is, the leaders and their associates. Given some unchristian attitudes amidst some church leaders particularly in relation to wealth pursuit, breakaways, and some other social and moral misdemeanour, several onlookers believe that ‘church in Nigeria is a business venture’ regardless the standpoint of parishioners. Meanwhile, the average church person believes that churches are founded in order to accomplish God’s divine mandate on earth. The study, therefore, was poised to address these two conflicting notions about the church and church building in Nigeria as St. Paul’s concept of church building and accountability in his first epistle to the Corinthians particularly the third chapter was assessed using theological and hermeneutical approach in the course of the study. Essentially, the chosen text was appraised and the result of the exegesis was used to analyse the issue of church building and accountability in the nation. It was established that church building in Nigeria is marred with one social malady or another, including unhealthy rivalry. The Christian Association of Nigeria is therefore enjoined to decisively and objectively address such as to have a befitting church in the country.

**Keywords:** Church building, accountability, Nigeria, Pauline theology

### **Introduction**

In his inaugural lecture, Ayantayo argues that religious leaders in Nigeria have in several regards abducted God by “forcibly taking Him away against His way.”<sup>1</sup> This abduction of God, as it were, is most glaring in the interpretation of the Bible by the various church leaders out of context to suit their various personal interests and the resultant aftermaths amidst the divergent notions within their various congregations in the nation have been outrageously misleading. As the saying has always been,

such misguided congregations have constantly imbibed wrong Christian notions and hence very shallow, baseless, and lackadaisical in their general perception of the Christian faith. Strictly speaking, the probity and accountability, which this study sets out to address is in relation to the quality of life or conduct among the Christian faithful across the board which results basically from the teachings and belief systems of the various and individual denominations.

The question then is how has the church been built in Nigeria? On what and who have the various builders been building the faith and conducts of their memberships in terms of doctrine which intrinsically and naturally is seen reflected in their conduct and behavioural patterns? Simply put, could the Nigerian Christians stand the real test of life realities vis-à-vis the teachings of the holy book? These and many more other questions are the tasks of this exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

### **Background**

When the term ‘church building’ or building of the church is mentioned, the first obvious thing that comes to mind is setting up of a location where people gather for fellowship or worship, or erecting a mighty glorious edifice somewhere with the tag Church on the billboard in front of it. Such a claim or stand is nonetheless an obvious one. However, a superficial look at the text under review and other related Pauline texts such as 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Ephesians 1:22-23 paint a different picture altogether. Paul being exasperated, as it were, by the contrary notion amidst those that made up the local assembly he founded during his second missionary journey (cf. Acts 18:11) at Corinth in about AD 50 over who was who among the church leaders (him or any of his colleagues especially Apollos cf. vv. 4-6), had to write this exhortation acquainting them of what church building or building of church is more like.<sup>2</sup> Thus, interpreting 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 in the light of church building in Nigeria entails an appraisal of church leadership in Nigeria vis-à-vis the church building style documented by the early church building expert as verse ten (v10) explains. In other words, the study intends, among others, to examine the depth and nature of the 21st century Christianity in Nigeria, whether it is rooted to the human leaders or the Owner of the church Himself.

**Research Methods**

Interpreting any epistolary book could be one of the most problematic tasks to venture into, given the peculiar nature of epistles as occasional documents as one thing or the other would have motivated them. The exegesis of the text was carried out as the historical and cultural settings of the text were explored. This helped to determine the position of Paul as he wrote the pericope and the attitudinal stance of the Corinthian church at the time of the text. Consequently, critical redaction approach vis-à-vis situational issues (especially as it pertains to African concerns) is equally significant to the study. The redaction approach is most tenable whether as one views studying the text from theological perspective as it were, or occasional as generally perceived of the Epistles. The approach greatly assisted in revealing the genre and in turn provided relevant substances for proper elucidation of facts in the course of the study. On the whole, the same ultimately determined the compass for reading the work.

**Analysis of the Text (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)**

The first epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, like the other Pauline writings or even other epistles is an “occasional document,”<sup>3</sup> that is, a striking event amidst the recipients or the other would have motivated the writing unlike the Four Gospels or the Acts where the writings are quite didactic or catechetical as it were. These events were numerous in the Corinthian Church which includes sexual immorality, law suits, incest, and factions, among others. Paul, therefore wrote to address the issues.

In the text, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, for instance, Paul in response to the report he got from the household of Chloe that the church in Corinth was breaking into factions, wrote to acquaint the faithful of what it really means to build the Church of God. As a matter of fact, the narrative begins from verse one (v1) where Paul stated that he could not address them “as spiritual but as worldly.” Thus, beginning from v9, he wrote this paragraph to educate on church building especially to those involved in preaching and teaching, and to those with one responsibility or the other “within a local congregation”<sup>4</sup> traditionally called a particular church of God. In Pauline sense, a genuine builder knows one thing for certainty, God designs the building programme and each man in the project makes a contribution; hence Paul regarded himself as an evangelist-missionary. Consequently, he started churches, that is, he laid the foundations upon which others built.

**Vv. 10-11:** In these verses, Paul started by saying ... ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, *hæs sofos architektaen themelion ethēka*, (“as a skilled designer, I laid the foundation”). The design or plan of the building, as it were, is from God. All things must be done according to the pattern which He has exhibited; but the execution of this plan was entrusted chiefly to Paul. He was the wise or experienced architect which God used in order to lay the foundation; to ascertain the fundamental and unchanging set of guidelines of the Gospel, those alone which came from God, and which alone He would bless to the salvation of humankind. Thus, Paul warned, ἕκαστος δὲ βλέπετω πῶς ἐποικοδομεῖ, (*ekastos de blepetæ pæs epoikodomei*. “Let one be careful how he builds on it.”). In essence, Paul’s counsel here is to let whoever that is to continue the work take care that the doctrines which he or she preaches and teaches would not jeopardise those which he had already preached and taught; let the person also take heed to enjoin no other practice than that which is suitable to the doctrines and in every sense accords with it. Paul, here, is not just referring to “doctrinal structure of the Church ... but every aspect of her corporate life.”<sup>5</sup> The skilled-builder built on the Foundation which is Christ Jesus Himself.

The aorist ἔθηκα, (*etheka*, “I laid”) refers to an accomplished work or the eighteen months of ministry which he (Paul) spent in Corinth establishing the Church through the directives of Jesus Christ. The warning, therefore, is to continue the building as modelled, that is, the building must be on the Foundation which is Christ. This he replicated in verse eleven, θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, (*themelion gar allon oudeis dunatai thenai para ton keimenon* (“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid,”). In regard to this, Clarke writes that Paul was not speaking particularly concerning the foundation of this spiritual building which can have no other foundation than Jesus Christ and argues that there cannot be two opinions on this subject among the true Apostles of our Lord. He asserts, however, that the only fear was, lest an improper use should be made of this heavenly doctrine; lest a bad superstructure should be raised on this foundation.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, if the superstructure would not please the Apostle, that is, reflect anything other than the original pattern, he was prepared to intervene. Such was his relationship with the Corinthian Church which any umbrella organisation like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) must of necessity replicate regarding issues that border on sanity of the church.

**Vv. 12-13:** This passage starts with an ‘if’ clause, εἰ δὲ τις ἐποικοδομεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν θεμέλιον, (*ei de tis epikodomei epi ton themelion* (“if anyone builds upon the foundation”), then as was characteristic of Paul, imageries apt for description for standard building on the only foundation were given namely gold, silver, precious stones as well as others which could only be used by those that care not to observe the rules were equally given, namely, woods, hays, and stubbles. In disclosing this to his audience, Paul did not however hesitate to resonate the theme of reward already mentioned in verse eight. Emphases here are not necessarily on building of one’s individual Christian life as it were, although such may be implied. Most certainly, “the emphasis is on how church leaders guide the church (individual congregations and others that may copy such). They can do so with various materials: ‘gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw.’”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the "gold, silver, precious stones," which all can bear fire (Rev 3:18; 21:18-19; Isa 54:11), are teachings that will stand the test of judgment: "wood, hay, stubble," are those which cannot stand the test of time, for such would destroy the foundation (which all admitted is Christ). Such also include teachings mixed up with human philosophy and Judaism-miscellaneous rather than useful.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from the teachings, the superstructure represents also the persons associated with the Church, the reality of whose conversion, through the teachers' instrumentality, will be tested at the last day, and this test, Paul illustrated as taking items through the burning heat and flame of fire, Greek *pur* which naturally consumes any substance that is consumable like wood, hay, and straw. Where there is the least grain of real faith, it shall never be lost (cf. 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12) whereas the straw only feeds the fire (cf. Matt 5:19). As stated earlier, since Paul’s emphasis was on the leaders of the church, the elements that the imageries represent is teaching as well as the leadership patterns of the pastor in leading the church. While some teachings can actually build up, encourage, edify, and strengthen the people in the church (signifying gold, silver, and costly stones), other or false teachings can weaken the system by causing divisions, and or worse still, tearing down the foundation of God’s building (turning the church of God into something far less than a holy assembly which in Nigerian parlance can be called a “social club” with tenets far from the Biblical absolutes) and such teachings represent wood, hay, and straw.

Reacting to this notion of tearing down the foundation of the church, Verbrugge asserts that no responsible church leader would deliberately do anything that could weaken the church, but implicitly

suggests one very thing in the early church that could yield such result namely “emphasis on the Jewish law” as well as undue emphasis on “total freedom from the law” alongside sole dependence on the “Spirit”<sup>9</sup> which he argues yielded different results in the early church. The church in Nigeria has more than one or two things that tend to weaken the system viz. syncretism in some quarters, materialism in another or both, tribalism, nepotism, and in the new generation churches, undue emphasis on the Spirit, “familiocracy”, etc. This will be fully discussed in the subsequent segments.

**Vv. 14-15:** εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ ὃ ἐποικοδόμησεν, (*ei tinos to ergon meneir o epoikodomosen* - “If any man's work abides”). This clause, as referred to in the preceding paragraph, most probably, is an allusion to the purifying of different sorts of vessels under the law. All that could stand the fire were to be purified by the fire; and those which could not resist the action of the fire were to be purified by water (Num. 31:23). The gold, silver, and precious stones, could stand the fire; but the wood, hay, and stubble, must be necessarily consumed. Hence, μισθὸν λήμψεται (*misthon lēmpsetai* - “he will receive reward”). The rewards will be according to the quality of service measured by the doctrine of the individual church or pastor. This last clause is sequel to verse eight above that states the man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. The question then is do some pastors of nowadays put such verse into consideration as they adopt certain doctrines and notions in their denominations? Critical answer to such question is the main thrust of this work which shall be duly attended to in the subsequent segments.

The climax of this paragraph is in the fifteenth verse: the ultimate reward or retributive consequence clause of the text - εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται, ζῆμιωθήσεται (*ei tinos to ergon katakarsetai, zēmiōthēsetai* - “if anyone's work is burned up by fire, he will suffer loss”). As in the preceding verse, this verse starts with an “If” clause, “If any man's work shall be burned,” in the course of the screening, the consequence is “he shall suffer loss,” that is, the reward of building the church of Christ on wrong foundation (falsehood); meaning that such would have “preached the necessity of incorporating the law with the Gospel, proclaimed as a doctrine of God anything which did not proceed from heaven, he shall suffer loss; all his time and labour will be found to be uselessly employed and spent.”<sup>10</sup> This is particularly serious. Building on anything other than the foundation laid by Christ is rather more serious than anything one can imagine. In the final clause, Paul gave a further

consequence, αὐτὸς δὲ σωθήσεται, οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός. (*autos de saethsetai, houtoes de hoes dia puros* - “But, he himself will be saved; it will be as through fire”). The apostle seemed not to promise any palatable consequence. The clause, put in today’s English, would read, “If such would be saved at all, it would be as though through fire.” Adams puts it thus:

If he sincerely and conscientiously believed what he preached, and yet preached what was wrong, not through malice or opposition to the Gospel, but through mere ignorance, he shall be saved; God in his mercy will pass by his errors; and he shall not suffer punishment because he was mistaken. Yet, as in most erroneous teachings there is generally a portion of wilful and obstinate ignorance, the salvation of such erroneous teachers is very rare; and is expressed here, yet so as by fire, i.e. with great difficulty; a mere escape; a hair's breadth deliverance; he shall be like a brand plucked out of the fire.<sup>11</sup>

The apostle, no doubt, here refers to a situation where a man, who, having built a house, and begun to dwell in it, the house happens to be set on fire, and he has warning of it just in time to escape with his life, losing at the same time his house, his goods, his labour, and almost his own life. Thus, he who, while he holds the doctrine of Christ crucified as the only foundation on which a soul can rest its hopes of salvation, and at the same time builds on that foundation, Antinomianism, or any other erroneous or destructive doctrine, such shall lose all his labour, and his own soul scarcely escapes everlasting perdition; nor even this unless sheer ignorance and inveterate prejudice, connected with much sincerity, be found in his case.

### **Church Building in Nigeria**

Anything Church in Nigeria could best be discussed under two main groups viz. the mainline, and the indigenous churches. These are so grouped because of their various distinct characteristics. Such peculiar features regarding the individual groups entail the doctrinal or ideological materials used in building or developing them.

The term ‘mainline churches’ is a new one, as it were, used to distinguish between old well-established churches and other ones that were coming up in America. The usage dates back to 1985 in the US when William Hutchison used it to tell between "old" denominations that had long been active in the U.S. as well as having deep historical roots such as reaching back to the Protestant Reformation. These denominations came

into the U.S. from all over Europe, or were developed from a similar denomination already established in Europe.<sup>12</sup> The mainline denominations contrast significantly with evangelical churches in a number of ways, and yet they were, at one time, nearly parallel theologically. However, Barna whom history has as the one who gave this concept a clear coloration, in 2009, came up with a more correct touch to the view and eventually supplied the list of the denominations classed as mainline or mainstream as stated in the following: “American Baptist Churches in the USA, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church”<sup>13</sup> and of course, the Roman Catholic Church.

Here in Nigeria, the mainline churches or denominations, in similar vein, include those early denominations brought to Nigeria by the early Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States of America. Obiefuna, Nwadiakor and Umeanolue, unlike Barna include Roman Catholicism, and the Church Missionary Society Anglican form of Christianity among the mainline churches. Others include the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists,<sup>14</sup> and other evangelical denominations who have their headquarters in Europe and America. Madu in his *Fundamentals of Religious Studies* stylishly christens members of these clientele of denominations as African Christians with European world-view<sup>15</sup> whom scholars believe are neither true Africans nor able to truly assimilate the Christian traditions fully. This half-baked Christianity stance which the Nigerian Christians of this clientele started with arising from the notion of colonization other than real Christianization affected church building in the nation from the very outset of Christianity in Nigeria thereby crippling real growth of the church. Besides, doing sound biblical theology, even though it is believed that the bible was the basis for their theology, was basically impossible because those early missionaries just offered the people “what seemed to be Christian message”<sup>16</sup> and not necessarily Christian message that could mould the indigenes and have them developed adequately leaving several members with the natural tendency to revert to traditional religion hence syncretism becomes the seeming lifestyle among members in those denominations as certain adherents who were not comfortable with such practices were thus left with the usual option of leaving such groups and founding their own churches.<sup>17</sup>

The next Christian group that makes up the Christian community in Nigeria is the Indigenous Churches. These indigenous churches could



best be discussed under two main categories viz. the spiritual indigenous and the Pentecostal indigenous churches. Meanwhile, it is important to state that there were early indigenous churches in Nigeria before the spiritual and Pentecostal type churches whose tenets were close to that of the mainline churches already mentioned except for polygamy in one or two of them. Such include the Native Baptist Church; the United Native African Church; the African Church, Bethel; and the United African Methodist Church. Thus, while the spiritual indigenous churches include the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Aladura clientele of churches, and other churches with the same tenets of faith, the Pentecostal indigenous churches are those churches that emphasise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. What is important to state as one discusses the indigenous Pentecostal churches is the fact that they are equally in two categories, namely the early Pentecostals and the new generation Pentecostal churches. As mentioned earlier, these churches left the different mainline churches for one reason or the other to establish their respective churches and this shall be duly attended to subsequently.

As Obiefuna and others put it, the colonialism that trended in the 19th and 20th centuries in the Nigerian society was not just exclusive in the social or secular world but also in the ecclesiastical world. Thus, the “rejection of almost everything African by both the early missionaries and colonizers as ‘primitive’, unreliable, dubious and fetish really baffled many Africans who saw such an affront as humiliating.” Moreover, “the European brand of Christianity was neither satisfactory to the Africans, nor did it provide answers or solutions to certain African problems.”<sup>18</sup> For instance, the missionaries of the older Churches failed to address the type of questions the African situation raised for them such as witchcraft, demon possession, haunting by evil spirits, the cult of ancestors; the use of protective charms, talisman; sorcery, etc. which require serious solution to the various social and economic as well as medical concerns. The chance therefore, abounded that accordingly secessions took place in tandem with people’s thrusts and needs. Incidentally, some indigenous churches began to emerge.

Basically, the spiritual indigenous churches which include the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Aladura clientele of churches are essentially very African in their teachings and practices. Based on the practices in the Cherubim and Seraphim Church which are characteristic of all spiritual churches, foremost of the practices is syncretism – combination of traditional African religious beliefs with that of Christianity evident in the prayer patterns such as the traditional

routine in believing that routes of getting “what one wants is like following a systematic order”<sup>19</sup> especially by using certain Psalms to overcome an enemy. Polygamy is also practised among the membership as well as the clergy in this group as it is practised in the African indigenous religion. The group, as it were, believes that human destiny is regulated or modified by spiritual agencies. Thus, they claim to have conscious knowledge of evil spirits which sow the seeds of discomfort and set afloat ill-luck, diseases, induce barrenness, sterility among others amidst people; and consequently, exorcism is a common practice in virtually the same way as it is practiced in the traditional religion. Further to this is interpretation of dreams, visions, trances, etc. as in the African traditional religious practices. Prophets and prophetesses like the fetish priests as in the traditional religion have the responsibility of interpreting these mysteries to patients. This rather makes the spiritual churches a kind of African traditional religion in modern clad as some scholars, Uchenna Onwuzulike<sup>20</sup> for example, brand them. Put simply, church building among this group is basically weak and unscriptural.

The Pentecostal Churches, whether the early Pentecostals like the Garrick Sokary Braide’s movement that metamorphosed into Christ Army Church established in 1918 after his death by one of his followers, and that of Joseph Ayo Babalola’s movement which through thick and thin metamorphosed into the Christ Apostolic Church in 1943; or the later Pentecostal churches which include all churches of Pentecostal persuasion since the 1960s to date are basically practical in their approach to Christian living as they put biblical realities to work and essentially such that emphasise the gifts of the Holy Spirit with initial evidence of glossolalia and ecstasy as the case may be. As in Braide’s and Babalola’s revivals, these groups of Christians regardless of the individual denomination, unlike the mainline Churches, decline the various doctrines, Creeds, and Articles of Faith, recitations of the Lord’s prayer and Catechisms as it were and rather adopted a non-intellectual and practical approach to Christianity and teach their adherents “to simply believe in the Lord Jesus, and denounce fetishism and worship God alone,”<sup>21</sup> and in strong terms instruct followers to abstain from idols and pollution of idols emphasising absolute dependence on God for protections and blessings of any kind which Jesus (John 6:29-33) and the early apostles (Acts 3:12-16) taught and practiced which the 21st century Church must follow. Another strong area of emphasis among this group is abstinence from buying and selling of alcoholic beverages especially the consumption of same by the members. Thus, the Pentecostal churches

except very few like the Assemblies of God Church, Four Square Gospel Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, and very few others that really emphasise on doctrines and serious intellectual development in Christian and biblical matters, very many others do not. Those others, the new Pentecostal Churches, just discourage unchristian practices like syncretism, idolatry, and all kinds of immoral living among others as indicated above either due to improper education on Christian theology or sheer belief that emphasis on doctrines and any form of intellectual developments would amount to loss of concentration on the Holy Ghost in the fellowship of the church, and incidentally, the Pentecostals put together seem to outnumber other groups in Nigeria put together. And, none of the Pentecostal denominations endorses syncretism like the spiritual churches per se, the main vice among most of them is materialism.

The materialistic tendencies is so gross that the Roman Catholic's extortions of the 16th century which marred the testimony and fellowship of the then Church and consequently caused the revolution that brought about the regrettable evolution of the multiplicity of churches is stupendously rekindled. As a matter of fact, this extortion is taken to such a level that untold ridiculous means of extorting money from worshippers are hence designed by very many Pentecostal pastors in the country. Apart from undue stress on tithes, vow making, and anniversary celebration which in one way or the other have occasional scriptural supports virtually in the Old Testament, very many other funny money generating strategies have been designed, including Pastors' Day, seed-sowing, seed of faith, first fruits, spontaneous offering during sermons, pulpit offering, among others.<sup>22</sup> This money theology issue is so much that the average Pentecostal pastor on regular basis spends time to develop materials on one fund-raising related message or the other that weighty matters of the gospel such as justice, mercy and faith (cf. Matt. 23:23) are glaringly neglected.

Besides, it is pathetic to note that 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, regarding the issues so far discussed, or any such New Testament passage is virtually not referred to by most present day Nigerian church leaders. Thus, materialism has become the order of the day among preachers making the Christian value system essentially materialistic as if that is the main essence of the Christian faith contrary to Paul's model as well as that of his colleagues (1 Cor. 15:19; cf. 2 Pet. 3:7, 10-16; etc.), pertaining building of Church, which was a major theme in the Apostolic age. The *he hemera* referred to in v 13 of the text was used by Paul *pari passu* with

“the Day of Yahweh” in the Old Testament or “the judgement Day” (cf. 1 Thess. 4:4; 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:10; Rom. 2:16; 13:12; Matt. 12:36; Isa. 2:12; Jer. 46:10; etc.)<sup>23</sup> referring to judgement and reward system programmed for leaders of any strata. How the inclination of the various groups, either the mainlines, the spiritual, or the Pentecostal churches has adversely affected church building in Nigeria and other African communities vis-à-vis Pauline Christianity is the task of the subsequent segments.

### **Relating Church Building in Nigeria to the Pauline Model**

In the context of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, one could ask, what would Paul tell the various groups of Christian churches in Nigerian context? Using the imagery of a literal architectural building, Paul expressed his fear that the Corinthians would suddenly slide into the subtlety of changing “the foundation” of Christian Faith, “thinking they are not replacing Christ but supplementing him with fuller and richer spirituality” without knowing that the end product of such would “not be a Christian church.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, he (Paul) was here making a quick reaction to his observation regarding an odious happening (e.g., schism capable of marring the church) in the church he planted in Corinth in connection to some attitudinal behaviours resulting from such strange teachings the congregation would have imbibed which was already reflecting ways of living. Relating the situation in Corinth and Paul’s reaction to the churches in Nigeria today, the individual churches deserve stern rebuke or commendation accordingly.

In the general analysis, Paul would speak to each of the persuasions as it would apply to the very group either the mainline churches, the spirituals, or the Pentecostals. To mainlines and their Eurocentric notion groups, Paul would ask, from whom they learnt their anti-indigenous hermeneutics and homiletics as well as liturgy, for example, western music and dissuading the membership from consulting oracles without providing requisite alternatives to resolve their spiritual/material needs which were instrumental to the mass exodus from the fold in the early days? Also, he would not mince words to tell them that their tendencies were mere adoption of notions alien to Christ’s often called worldly or “wisdom of the world” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20ff) which “excludes God and emphasises human self-sufficiency thus making man the highest authority and refuses to recognise God’s revelation in Jesus”<sup>25</sup> as evident in the Westernised Christianity in Nigeria of the early missionary churches rather than indigenising their Christian teachings.

As he wrote to the Corinthian church, Paul would no doubt say to them, “When I came to you, I did not come proclaiming to you testimony of God in lofty words of wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified...” (1 Cor. 2:1-3ff, RSV); and in his natural self, would ask, “Who has bewitched you?” (Gal. 3:1a). With respect to 1 Corinthians 2:1-3ff where Paul branded such attitude as childish and sensual, it could be clear that the Apostle was apt to the Corinthians that building of Christian life or conduct should not necessarily be based on “latest human wisdom either in the world or even the church”<sup>26</sup> but on the central truth of the gospel (redemption through Christ) and the power of the Holy Ghost. Strictly speaking, as stated earlier in the preceding paragraph, absence of the centrality of the gospel of Christ and of the power of the Holy Spirit led to several reactions by the indigenes; hence some resorted to syncretic practices while yet in the church whereas others had no choice than to leave the various mainlines either back to African Traditional Religion or to found other churches.

To the spiritual churches, he would on seeing so much of Africanism in the Spiritual churches in strong terms say,

as commendable as our efforts to establish Afro-Centric Christianity vis-à-vis Afro-Centric perception of Biblical studies, it should be pursued more objectively and dispassionately and should not be taken too far, else it may be tantamount to another form of colonizing (re-colonising) the Biblical studies whereby African culture may impose itself upon the essence of the Bible message which itself is ambivalent in its sacred space.<sup>27</sup>

It is often common even natural that as people try to correct issues, they end up complicating matters. It is certain that such happened in most of the indigenous churches especially the spiritual churches and one or two more others particularly among those that seceded from the mainline churches in 19th century. Asaju’s classical advice in the quotation above, in several regards, applies to this clientele of Christians in Nigeria and their approach to church building. Trying to come out of the shackles of colonialism in the mainline Churches, they inadvertently drifted back to the indigenous religious practices thereby provoking Pauline rebukes, as it were. Should Apostle Paul be around and see such, he would say, my brethren, if you felt you were being westernized, you should not have departed from Christian ideals and lapsed into idolatry because such is more like the “sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat” who led the people to sin against God by reason of his worthless idols (cf. 1 King 12:26-33; 15:34; 16:25-26) and eventually led the subsequent generations to “counterfeit

religious system.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, indigenisation of Christianity should not be such that African culture could impose itself upon the essence of the Biblical or Christian ideals which itself is ambivalent in its sacred space especially where such is anti-human. For example Christianity is and will never be against use of African medicine such as herbal medicine to cure of diseases is always encouraged. However, such idolatrous practices like consultation of spirits of the deceased and sacrifices to the spiritual world will never be Christian.

And to the Pentecostals, he would, in very strong terms, let them know that they have greatly deviated from Biblical ideals and somewhat left the Church’s foundation which is Jesus Christ. He would make them understand that theirs are more like establishing “Christless Christianity” substituting his notion of building with “worthless materials”<sup>29</sup> by reason of their undue emphasis on materialism. Such unscriptural act has affected their preaching and leadership style to the point that promotions are not on the basis of Christian tradition of spiritual gifts and character (cf. Acts 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:1-7ff; Rom. 12:3-8), but on the basis of closeness to the Pastor in terms of family affinity, or which member and particularly an under-shepherd who gives the fattest gifts to the Pastor. This emphasis on materialism has gotten to the point that some people have come to believe that clerical work among this group is more or less a business venture where material acquisitions are bases for ecclesiastical association, belonging, and commitment which Paul vehemently frowned at (cf. 1 Tim 6:5). As stated above, where such abounds, Christianity has no depth, and any wonder the common saying that Nigerian or African Christianity is wider than the world but shallower than a tip of the finger.

Looking at these streams of churches, one evil or the other is seen showing itself very prominently in each of them, and one in particular is seemingly predominant across the board. Among the mainline, it is westernisation that is the issue; in the spiritual churches, it is traditional practices otherwise known as syncretism that is in vogue; while materialism is the order of the day in the Pentecostals. This however, indicates that the Church in Nigeria has hitherto ceaselessly faced one onslaught or the other. And in each of the cases, church building is adversely affected and growth inherently inhibited. Whether westernisation, syncretism, or materialism, one ill is most obvious and that alone is the issue – the quest to dominate and thus create wealth for personal aggrandisement. This, of course, is a disaster. In another development, it could be christened the natural cancer that has plagued the

Church for quite a long period in its history. Writing in respect of this, Akhilomen declares:

Financially, the Roman Catholic Church avariciously accumulated wealth to the extent that it became embarrassingly enormous. More saddening is the fact that this vast wealth was not equally distributed, as a few priests controlled the wealth which was the source of envy to others and scandal to the laity. It was about this period, a story was told of Pope Leo X and Thomas Aquinas (a priest, philosopher and theologian). The story goes thus: Thomas came to see the Pope on some matters, but met Pope counting huge amount of money in sacks.... This money supposedly came from the "Sales of Indulgence." While Thomas stood by, Pope Leo called on Thomas and said, "Thomas! You see, the church of today cannot ... say silver and gold have I none." Then, Thomas replied, "Yes, Your Holiness, neither can the church of today say, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The church had the money but lost the power.<sup>30</sup>

That the church has drastically deviated from the Biblical tradition especially as upheld by Apostle Paul in the text would rather be an understatement. If Paul had told his Corinthian readers that he would rather call them carnal, he would choose a harsher adjective to qualify today's church especially as it relates to the Nigerian society. What could lead to such odious and horrendous departure from Biblical ideals? As asserts Verbrugge<sup>31</sup> (referred to in the analysis segment above), the individual teaching and leadership pattern adopted by the various denominations and group would orchestrate this. As such, the teachings and leadership patterns, would have originally been meant to protect the integrity of the church. Teachings or doctrinal issues, as one can say, are naturally contextual as they always have so much to do with the time and places where and when they subsist. In the apostles' time, especially as suggested by some scholars, such as Verbrugge<sup>32</sup> already mentioned above, and G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson<sup>33</sup> regarding the text, the obvious issue was lapsing into legality or any Hellenistic tendency vis-à-vis any leadership pattern that was not in keeping with the Apostles' tradition hence the warning and reward policy or system in Paul's writing (3:14-15). Whatever one teaches or preaches, and howsoever one leads therefore determines the rewards that await such a person.

**Conclusion**

In this work effort was made to interpret Church building in Nigeria in the light of 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. In doing this, the text in question was duly analysed in context of the subject matter as the result of the analysis was appropriately used to appraise the three main types of churches in Nigeria; namely the mainline, the spiritual, and the Pentecostal classes of churches. It was established that all the groups have one area of discrepancy or the other in their church building patterns that require serious review to conform to the Pauline church model.

As seen in the course of the work, the mainline churches have maintained their westernisation of Christianity thereby making Christian growth among the membership quite difficult. As a matter of fact, the practices are quite unoriginal to parishioners, thus, inadvertently having some members reverting to African traditional beliefs and virtually all African indigenous religious practices including occultism, witchcraft, etc., and yet claiming adherence to Christianity. The spiritual type of churches, on their part, do not seem to have improved in their gross syncretism contrary to the notion of indigenisation of Christianity as taught by the Apostles (Paul and his colleagues) which they (spiritual churches) claim was their main thrust when they embarked on their project of indigenisation of Christianity. For example, such practices as taking a patient to river-side and bathing same with recommended soaps, and road-side rituals etc. are such that Paul would vehemently frown at. He groups such among aspects of the Law that Christ's death took care of (cf. Col. 2:14-15). The Pentecostals, as seen above, have their own serious issues. In their efforts to interpret and present Christianity as a religion that is strong enough to enable one to have all that matters for life, including money, lapsed into undue emphasis on wealth and ended up making the pastor a monarch whose family members have to surround to enjoy the dynasty and the wealth thereof. As such is being done, this set of Christians have unarguably almost succeeded in deemphasising several other Christian teachings, such as charity and love neighbour, thus creating room for untold excesses in the Church.



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