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Explication of the Relationship Between the Ministers &  
the Ministry & Christ (1 COR. 3:1-15)



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## **Explication of the Relationship Between the Ministers & the Ministry & Christ (1 COR. 3:1-15): Contextual Understanding of Catholic Priests**

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### **Abstract**

The Word became Flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-14). This Word is named Jesus Christ (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31; 2:21). He took flesh and dwelt among us for the salvation of mankind (Matt. 1:21b). From the beginning, Jesus knew that the work of salvation has to go on from generation to generation and thus called people who would assist him to propagate the message even when he is no longer there physically. He thus selected disciples and out of the disciples he selected twelve ordinary men named apostles whose names and ministry appear in Matthew 10:2-26. This shows that Jesus Christ is the one who calls, the one who owns the ministry, and the one who will reward each according to his or her contribution and based on the quality of the contributions. The greatest problem today is that some ministers have forgotten that the ministry does not belong to them and have no reason at all to quarrel with one another but should see one another as collaborators in Christ's ministry. Secondly, some people of God have forgotten that every minister has God-given talent which should not warrant them to be involved in a personality cult that is, preferring one minister over another or even preferring a minister to Jesus. This paper aims at explaining again who a minister is, how he should see his fellow minister, and how he should see Jesus Christ. The work adopts the Historical-Critical Method (HCM) as well as Textual Criticism (TC) to unravel the inner meaning of 1 Cor. 3:1-15. HCM is a branch of criticism that investigates the origins of ancient texts in order to understand the world behind the text – 1 Cor. 3:1-15. In the same way, TC was used so as to get to the original wording of the text as was written by Paul. The writer discovers that some ministers have forgotten their roles, their relationship with their fellow ministers, and with Jesus Christ, the owner of the ministry. The paper recommends, among other things, that there should be the adequate formation of candidates going into the ministry as priests as well as constant catechesis on the part of members of the Church, especially, on the nature of the Church. This will enable us to avoid unnecessary rivalry in the Church. As a matter of policy, this should be started as soon as a child reaches the age of reasoning. Hence, the saying, “catch them young.” Significantly, this work will be of immense benefit to all the members of the Church as well as her ministers.

**Keywords:** *Explication, Relationship, Minister, Ministry*

## Introduction

In First Corinthians 3:1-15 Paul exposes and explicates what ought to be and what ought not to be first among ministers, secondly, among those they are ministering to as well as between the ministers and Jesus Christ the owner of the ministry. Paul made effort to remind ministers that they are nothing but mere servants employed by Jesus to work in God's vineyard, building, field, or Church. Paul made it clear that it was ignorance and childishness that would make a minister see himself as more important than the other minister as well as people of God to start making preferences among the ministers forgetting that God assigns each minister a particular work with a particular talent.

For the word “Minister” we can say that whenever Paul uses the title *diakonos* to refer to himself or to other leaders of the church (as we have in 1Cor 3:5), scholars translate it to mean minister, missionary, or servant. Paul uses the term *diakonos* in tandem with *synergnos* (co-worker) in 1Cor 3:5, 9 and 2Cor 6:1, 4.<sup>1</sup> Again the word ‘servant’ is equivalent to the Greek word *diakoneō*. The word ‘servant’ in its original New Testament usage means to “wait at the table”<sup>2</sup>. In a wider sense the infinitive ‘*diakonein*’ means, “to supervise the meal” (Acts 6:2). In Acts 6:2, the “*diakonein trapezais*’ emphatically brought out the idea of waiting at the table while the second, *synergnos* deals with the proclamation of the word.

The most important thing in both (the servants and the ministers of the common meal and servants or ministers of the gospel) is that both are agents. Christ himself appointed the ministers of the word during his earthly ministry, and those ministers of the word later appointed the ministers of the table. The same word also seems to be used in the sense of the angels who ministered to Jesus after the temptation “*diēkonoun autō*” (Mark 1:13; Matt 4:11). In this work, therefore, whether we use servant or minister or priest, we are still referring to the same reality (see Luke 22:26; Mark 10:45). Therefore, “A Minister is a person authorized to conduct worship, administer sacraments, providing pastoral care, etc in a Christian church,” especially in the Holy Roman Catholic Church. One who works on behalf of God for the good of his people. Hence, to serve as a minister of religion is to minister to a congregation. The person works on behalf of the person who appointed him. God, from the above context, is the one who calls and directs a minister. No minister, therefore, exists on his own accord or interest. A minister is appointed when there is a need (Acts 6:1-7).

In 1 Cor. 3:1-15, Paul was particularly not happy with the type of division that exists in the Corinthian community and knew very well the source of division and tackled it headlong. What is very clear in 1 Cor 3:1-15 is that ministers, i.e, Paul, Appolos, and Peter were never part of the

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<sup>1</sup>Soskice, J. and Lipton, D. (2003) Oxford Readings in Feminism: Feminism & Theology, Oxford, Oxford Uni. Press. 211

<sup>2</sup>Matera, J.F.(1994) “Servant” in Achtemeier, J.P. (Gn.Ed.) Harper’s Bible Dictionary, Bangalore: Theological Pub.929.

division. They were really working harmoniously among themselves without infringing on each other's rights. Even if all were not aware of their status, at least Paul knew and made effort to sustain that.

A personality cult is what is destroying the Church today. The worst is that some ministers are the ones promoting it. It is rooted in the way they carry themselves and how they present their colleagues at their backs. There are Catholic Priests, Parish Priests, and Assistant Parish Priests; there are those who have special ministries and can organize crusades every night or every now and then; there are also some priests who must live in residence in the parishes to enable them to face other responsibilities assigned to them. One can puff up feeling that his position is more exalted than that of his neighbour. Through that, he may divide the people of God into factions and some members of the Church will be their followers. This work will help to explain clearly that the way Peter is called is the way Paul was called. Each will be rewarded at the end of the day according to the quality of his contribution.

### Literary Analysis of 1Cor 3:1-15

There are two important theories, which are connected with the literary composition of 1 Corinthians namely division and unity theories. These two theories seem to be diametrically opposed to one another. In the division theories, questions regarding the number of letters written by Paul to Corinth and the literary integrity of each are questioned. It also responds to the following incongruities perceived in 1 Corinthians: (a) Apparent contradictions between 4:17-21 and 16:5-11. (b) Different epistolary occasions like the visit of Chloe's people (1:11); letter of 7:1; reference to Stephanas' household 1:16 without any further elaborations, sudden announcement 16:15-18 and finally in 11:18 Paul appears to be ignorant of the problem in the Corinthian community. (c) There are also some literary breaks. According to this theory, "*peri de*," -now concerning (7:1, 25; 8:1, 4; 12:1; 16:1, 12) introduces unified and consistent ideas. Hence, they are regarded as part of the same letter, whereas all others from chapters 7-16 which are not introduced with "*peri de*" belong to a different letter.<sup>3</sup>

In the Unity Theories, the problems raised by "partition /division theories" are questioned. For instance, Luhrmann (1986) argues that in the "arrangement of topics in 1 Corinthians, Paul was governed by his own rhetorical purposes and was not confined to the order of the Corinthian's letter."<sup>4</sup> In the same way, it is rhetorical rather than historical reasons that can account for some of the inconsistencies between 4: 17-21 and 16: 5-11, and between 1:11 and 11:18.<sup>5</sup>

Paul presented First Corinthians in a familiar chiasmic pattern: A-B-A<sup>1</sup>. The letter is constructed in chiasmic parallelism. In "A" Paul offers some general considerations, in "B" there is a seeming digression that supports his argument and finally, in "A<sup>1</sup>" he offers a further reflection

<sup>3</sup>Dieter Betz, H., Mitchell, M. (1986) "Corinthian First Epistle to the," in Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. A-C, 1142

<sup>4</sup>Dieter Betz, H., Mitchell, M (1996), 1143.

<sup>5</sup>Dieter Betz H., 1143.

and responds to the particular issue at hand. “Paul’s use of digression in support of his argument is consistent with the ancient rhetorician’s understanding of digression.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, it is undeniable that he must have learned that from the ancient rhetoricians. Paul’s use of digression within an encompassing chiasmic structure is to be seen clearly in 1:10-3:23. Thus he treats the issue of unity in a general fashion (1: 10-2:5) “A”; there seems to be a digression in (2:6-16) “B”; then he returns to his initial topic (3:1-23) “A<sup>1</sup>.”<sup>7</sup> The idea that Paul organizes his thought in a chiasmic pattern goes a long way to show the unity of the letter.

A closer look at 1 Cor 3:1-15 reveals that Vv1-4 is a touch of sarcasm, for in it Paul addresses them as infants and fleshly people. Whereas in Vv10-15 we see threats.<sup>8</sup> Again, within these fifteen verses we can see three types of rhetoric that Paul employs in the whole letter namely: (I) Deliberative rhetoric (which argues for or against some future course of action Vv 1-4). (II) Epideictic rhetoric (which was designed from public speeches or funeral orations to praise or blame persons, cities, or ideas, Vv5-11). (III) Forensic or judicial rhetoric (which was used in law courts to defend or condemn past actions, Vv12-15).<sup>9</sup> In 3:1-15 we see also oppositional statements like “mature versus infant.” The seeming inconsistencies reveal the letter’s ad hoc nature.

### **Delimitation of 1 Corinthians 3:1-15**

Paul’s idea of (*mōria*) foolishness and (*sophia*) wisdom in 1:18-19 is recalled in 3:19-20, hence forming an *inclusio* or ring construction that identifies 1:18-3:23 as a distinct subunit. It is a subunit within a larger unit of chapters 1:10-4:21. Scholars are unanimous about this larger unit for it deals with the problems of division in the newly founded Corinthian community.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of all persuasions agree that 1:10-4:21 is a unit with subunits. They differ in the number of subunits within it. Some have 3:1-17 as a subunit; others have divided 3:1-17 into three smaller subunits: Vv1-4, Vv5-9, and Vv10-17. William Barclay has this text as two smaller subunits namely Vv1-9 and Vv10-15.<sup>11</sup> Barclay’s stand seems more plausible because in this research the interest is on the re-establishment of the supreme importance of God as the owner of the ministries while ministers are mere servants or workers. The research also looks at the “builders”(ministers/servants) as they construct. How they are able to carry out the work determines the type of rewards that awaits each of them.

A closer look at the subunit (1:18-3:23) that gave rise to the text exposes it as a series of midrashic (ancient rabbinic interpretation of scripture) expositions, their applications, and their conclusion. Hence the subunit can be divided into two midrashic expositions with their applications and a conclusion thus: midrash (1:18-31), application (2:1-5), midrash (2:6-16),

<sup>6</sup>Harrington, D. (1999) First Corinthians, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 7 Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, p14.

<sup>7</sup>Harrington, D. (1999), 15.

<sup>8</sup>Horsley, R.(1998) 1 Corinthians, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Nashville, Abigdom press,35.

<sup>9</sup>Horsley, R. (1998), 22.

<sup>10</sup>Raymond, C. First Corinthians, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 7, 86-87.

<sup>11</sup>Barclay, W.,(1997) The Letters to the Corinthians, The Daily Study Bible, Bangalore, Theological pub.29-33.



application (3:1-17), conclusion (3:18-20).<sup>12</sup> That shows that 3:1-17 is a midrashic application. The work does not include vv16 and 17 because the work is not really concerned with what happens to an already established church; but with how ministers/ co-workers/ servants contribute to the building up of the church (the body of Christ). Put differently, this work is not really interested in the metaphor of individuals being the temple of the Holy Spirit and what happens to anyone that destroys that temple. Anyone that destroys a temple of God that is the body of Christ (the Church, or individual members) God will destroy that person. such scope is beyond the scope of this work.

### **The Remote Context of 1Cor 3:1-15**

Paul is the founder of the Corinthian community. Each and every one of the members of the community were baptized in Christ and Christ died and rose for them. By implication, they ought to be united in Christ; they ought to be true brothers and sisters. But that seems not to be the case (1:13). So there is news especially from Chloe's household (1:11) that there was a problem in the young church, which Paul founded (3:10-15) namely division. The basic problem that was reported to Paul is factionalism where various individuals or segments of the Christian community are rallying around the name of one or another Christian minister-Apollos, Cephas, Paul, or even Christ himself (1:11-12). This division is contrary to the reason why was baptism. So the remote context of 1 Cor 3:1-15 is the existence of factions in the community. A community that was called together (1:10) under Christ (1:13) and as God's holy people (1:2) should always remain one.

### **The Immediate Context of 1Cor 3:1-15**

In the Corinthian community, there is a serious misunderstanding of the role of God as well as the role of the apostles in relation to the community. The Corinthian Christians fail to understand that both the minister and ministry as a whole belong to God. That God only employs ministers to help him build his "church." At the end of all things, he will reward each minister according to his or her own contributions and not just according to each person's contributions but according to the quality of the person's contribution. That is the thought that gave rise to our text. So in 1Cor 3:1-15, Paul indicts the Corinthians as immature Christians (Vv1-4), hence upholding the supreme importance of God for the progress of the ministry (Vv5-9) and finally reminds them that Corinthian Christians are God's building under construction (Vv10-15).

### **Textual Analysis of 1Cor 3:1-15**

Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians through dictation. It was transcribed by an anonymous scribe (16:21). It is more of a speech in the form of a letter. Barclay, William sums up the origin of textual problems in Pauline literature thus:

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<sup>12</sup>Raymon, C., 87.

Sometimes Paul is hard to understand because his sentences begin and never finish; his grammar breaks down and the construction becomes involved. We must not think of him sitting quietly at a desk, carefully polishing each sentence as he writes. We must think of him striding up and down some little room, pouring out a torrent of words, while his secretary races to get them down<sup>13</sup>

This textual analysis is based on the textual problems of the text as presented in the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland's critical apparatus. Hence, there are textual problems in Vv1-5, 10, 12-14 but there are none in Vv 6-9, 11, and 15. That means in 1 Cor. 3:1-15 nine verses have textual problems, and eleven verses have not. Let us just look at the details first and second verses for want of space and because the nuances one discovers while going through all the critical problems do not affect the substantial meaning of the content of 1 Cor. 3:1-15.

In verse one, there is an alternative reading of *sarkinois*. Third editions of Ephraemi (C<sup>3</sup>), and Bazaе (D<sup>2</sup>), also others like Augiensis (F), Boernerianus (G), 1881, some majority texts, Clp<sup>t</sup> have it as *sarkikois*. These two adjectives are from the same root *sarz* "flesh". All Greek adjectives ending in "-inoj" (-inos) means "made of" whereas *sarkikois* has an element of not only "made of" but also "dominated by the element." For to say that Corinthians were made of flesh (human nature) would only appear like re-stating the obvious, but to say that they are not only made of flesh but are also dominated by the flesh would make one to raise eyebrows.<sup>14</sup> This idea of fleshly domination would be making a caricature of the Christian baptism which is a new birth in Christ, hence, spirituals. *Sarkikois* seems to be an interpretation when one considers the age of the manuscripts that attest to it. But when compared in union with verse three, it seems to be more original to Paul, though P<sup>46</sup>, *Sinaiticus*, *Alexandrinus* (A), *Vaticanus* (B), original edition of *Ephraemi* (C<sup>\*</sup>), original edition of Bazaе (D<sup>\*</sup>), Koine *minuscules* -1289.6.33 etc. attest to *sarkinois*. These are powerful witnesses. But for better understanding and to expose the meaning Paul seems to actually have in mind, *Sarkikois* seems to be a better option.

In verse 2, there is an omission of *eti* "yet," (still, now) by some of the manuscripts like P<sup>46</sup>, *Vaticanus*, and 0185. They must have omitted it thinking that it is an unnecessary repetition of the word *nun* "now" but when two of them are taken together, they read thus, "even now;" thus producing an excellent translation. For the purpose of clarity, the work shall follow Nestle-Aland, P<sup>11vid</sup>, *Sinaiticus*, *Alexandrinus*, *Ephraemi Rescriptus*, *Bezae or Cantabrigiensis*, *Augiensis*, *Boernerianus*, y, 048, etc to retain *eti* and *nun* because it gives more clarity just like the *gam* of Hebrew thus producing an excellent translation.

### Content Analysis of 1Cor 3:1-15

<sup>13</sup>Barclay, W.,(1997) The Letters to the Corinthians, XV

<sup>14</sup> Barclay, W.,(1997), 31.

In this section, there will be a lexical (and diachronic) as well as a thematic study of keywords and major themes of the text. This will enable the author to penetrate the mind of Paul as he wrote. The following words that were selected and used by Paul need attention before we can fully comprehend 1Cor. 3:1-15. These keywords are crucial to the proper understanding of the theology of 1Cor 3:1-15 as Paul presented it, they include:

**Adelphoi:** This is a nominative plural noun, it is a masculine plural word from adelphos - "brother." It can refer to a male brother from the same womb (Matt 1:2). Its plural as used by Paul in this context can also mean brothers and sisters. In that sense, it stands for people of a close affinity, fellow member(s), and associate(s). In this work, we take **adelphoi** to mean brothers and sisters which indicates people from the same family or blood related, or people of the same community. In our context, it stands for people united with the "waters of baptism" which since it is spiritual, implies that it is thicker than "blood" that is physical.

Twenty times Paul addresses the Corinthians as his "brothers and sisters" (1:10, 11. 26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24, 29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6, 20, 26,39; 15:1, 50, 58; 16:15) thus expressing his affections for them. Also, Jesus calls all who are devoted to him "brothers" (Matt 12:50; Mark 3:35) which also refers to people of the same affinity.<sup>15</sup> This idea explains why Paul started his appeal for unity with a word that signifies close affinity. So as he calls them brothers, he reminds them of their close affinity in Christ.

**Sarkinois / Sarkikois:** They are two words with the same root namely *sarz*. **Sarkinois** is used here as an adjective and it is a dative masculine plural. As Paul uses it here, it means "being human" at a disappointing level of behaviour or characteristics, merely human or one who is completely outside divine influence (1Cor 3: 3ab-4; 1 Peter 2:11.)<sup>16</sup> By calling them **sarkinois**, Paul rules out their possibility of being Christ's aroma, for they ought to spread Christ's fragrance, men and women of sincerity, people commissioned by God, speakers of Christ, letters of Christ, the light of the world or salt of the earth, etc (2Cor 2:14; 3:3; Matt 5:13-14). The above word as used by Paul portrays the same idea though **sarkikoi** appears blunter. Both, from Pauline's point of view are opposed to *pneumatikois* – "spiritually dominated" or "spirit-filled." That Paul uses *sarz* does not mean that he condemns the Corinthians for being human, rather he condemns them for allowing their unredeemed human nature to overshadow them (1 Cor 3:1; Rom 7:14; Heb 7:16).

**Nēpiois:** This is an adjective and in the dative case as well as masculine plural, which can mean either an infant, minor, immature, or babe. It stands here as the indirect object of *lalēsai* "to speak". Paul is aware that a child has knowledge mostly on the here and now and hence does not see reality beyond himself/herself as compared to an adult (1 Cor 13: 11; Heb 5:13-14). On that level of reasoning too, milk is meant for children whereas solid food is meant for adults. This is clearly

<sup>15</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, London, The Uni. Of Chicago Press, 19.

<sup>16</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. 914.



explained in 1 Cor 3:1-15. For Paul, the strife, jealousy, and dissension in the Corinthian community are because Corinthian Christians are not yet mature in faith. They are living far below what Paul had expected. The sense Paul uses *nēpiois* here is different from the sense Christ used it in Matt 11:25; Luke 10:21. In the Pauline sense, children are those who can welcome and assimilate only the elementary teachings of the Christian faith whereas the mature/adults in faith are the ones who are ready for the main doctrines of the faith.<sup>17</sup> The adult can also defend what they believe in and children runs from danger as quickly as possible.

*Ephuteusa*: is first person singular, first aorist, active indicative from the word *phuteuō* meaning, "to plant". It is as if Paul says, "My work is only to plant" or "Planting is my own responsibility". *Epotisen* is 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, first aorist, active indicative from *potizō* meaning "to water". *Hēuzanen* is 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular, imperfect, active indicative from the word *auzanō* "to provide growth". These three verbs are juxtaposed in Vv 6, 7, and 8. By the use of these three verbs, Paul attributes the effects of their ministry to God.

The above agricultural metaphor allows Paul to reflect further on the subordinate roles that he and Apollos have in relation to the faith of the Corinthians. The image highlights the complementarity of Apollos' role in Paul's ministry. Paul's use of an emphatic "I" (Egō) allows him to continue to express the complementary nature of his role to that of Apollos. Again, Paul's use of a contrary *alla*, "but" underscores the singular and overarching role of God;<sup>18</sup> that means, without God the efforts of Paul and Apollos would be meaningless. While Paul was planting, Appolos was watering and God, the alpha and omega of creation, was providing the increase. Without the increase, the efforts of Paul and Appolos would be useless.

***Sunergoi***: This is an adjective, a nominative, masculine plural, meaning "fellow workers". It is a compound of two words namely *sun* preposition denoting "union", "with" or "together", and *ergoi* nominative plural from the word *ergon*. But their compound comes from *sunergos* meaning "a co-labourer", "workfellow," or "co-worker". In verse 9 "God" was mentioned three times indicating that both the result of the work and the co-workers belong to God. Hence the term co-workers designate those who are involved with Paul in the work of evangelization (Rom 16:3, 9 21; 2Cor 1:24).

***Diakonoi***: Nominative plural of *diakono* "Servant/minister". This is a masculine noun. It is in apposition to Apollos and Paul. *Diakonos* is one who "serves as an intermediary in a transaction, agent, intermediary, courier." Again, it is one who does something at the behest of a superior.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes the initiative is not his but that of his master. He downplays his own initiatives, if any, as long as the master is giving the directives of how things ought to be done. Hence, for a servant to remain relevant, he must do whatever the master directs him to do. This idea is clear in the

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<sup>17</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. 671.

<sup>18</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. 653.

<sup>19</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. 428.

following passages of the NT: John 2:5, 9; 12:26; Matt 22:13; Acts 16:17; 26:16. This idea is portrayed clearly in the words of Echema as he tries to curb the abuses being caused by some Catholic priests who moderate the Church's Liturgy according to their own whims and caprices when he said, "The priest is a servant of the Liturgy, not its inventor or producer."<sup>20</sup> So, in this sense, Paul calls himself and Apollos ministers or servants so as to teach the Corinthians that they are nothing but mere ambassadors or messengers of Christ or servants of Christ. They are messengers, which Christ uses for the building up of his body – “farm” or “building.” And for Paul, every instrument has an end (3:8-9).<sup>21</sup>

**Charin "grace":** This is a noun and an accusative feminine singular from the Greek word *charis* -which may mean for the sake of, on behalf of, on account of (Eph 3:1,14). It “is a beneficent disposition towards someone, favour, grace, gracious care/ help, goodwill”<sup>22</sup> As Paul uses it here, it means an undeserved gift. He means without it one can do nothing. Paul knows that it is through the *charis* of God that he was called to be an apostle, and infused with the powers and capabilities requisite for his office or call (3:10; Rom 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; 1Cor 15:10ab). It is like the promptings that urge one to work or do something positive. Without the owner of the vineyard, such urge or promptings may not be possible.

This underlies the fact that whatever an apostle achieves he or she is not even responsible for that. If he or she happens to receive a reward out of that, then it is still a gratuitous reward. The implications of this Pauline idea are so many. Hence, a minister or a servant in Pauline theology has no energy and initiative of his /her own (3:7-8a; 2 Cor 12: 9; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:2). In that sense, he is like an instrument in God's hand. From this, one can decipher the effect of *charis* "grace" from God cannot be differentiated from the effect of the *dunamis Theou* "power of God" not even from *gnōsis Theou* "knowledge of God." Any minister who understands the value of *charis*, *dunamis Theou*, *gnōsis Theou* will appreciate that he is only an instrument in God's hand.

**Misthon** –reward or wages: This is a noun and an accusative masculine singular, from the word, *misthos* which means recognition for the moral quality of an action, a recompense, an affirmation of laudable conduct especially by the divine.<sup>23</sup> It is like wages for a work well done. From the worldly point of view, wages are not considered a favour when bestowed on one who works for it, but as something due to the person (Rom 4:4). Hence, if one combines the Pauline idea of *charis* and *misthos* one will discover that to receive wages from God for being a minister is a favour, a gratuitous reward. It is not a due or right one merited. God will reward or favour

<sup>20</sup> Bishop Augustine Echema, Annual Conference of the Directors of Liturgy and Masters of Liturgical Ceremonies (Nigeria Catholic Network: CSN Resource Centre in Abuja, March 29, 2022).

<sup>21</sup>Danker, W (2000) Ed. 982.

<sup>22</sup>Gaston, D.(1963) A Companion to 1 Corinthians, Gloucester, London, Garton, Longman & Todd, 33.

<sup>23</sup>Orr, W., Walther, J “1 Corinthians, A New Translation”, in the Anchor Bible Dictionary, Garden City New York, Double day and co-Inc. 171.

whoever appreciates and makes appropriate use of the grace bestowed on him or her. Invariably, whoever fails to make use of the grace given to him or her will receive punishment. So the reward can either be positive or negative (3:12-14; Rev 22:12).

**Zēmiōthēsetai:** Third person singular, future indicative, passive of *zemioō* meaning to damage, or lose, or to forfeit, "he will suffer loss". This is a predicative future. As Paul uses it, it means to experience the loss of something, with the implication of undergoing hardship of suffering, and suffering damage.<sup>24</sup> That suffering is what one aimed by one's neglect or carelessness. It means to forfeit (Matt 26:26); and also to be punished because of one's past behaviour (1Cor3: 15). Paul uses it here to tell all ministers that each stands to be rewarded negatively on the day of the Lord depending on how one uses the grace was given to him or her. The joy of tomorrow, therefore, depends on how one makes use of the opportunities of today. The implication is that the joy of tomorrow depends on how today was spent. Hence, the saying, 'today is the mother of tomorrow.'

**Sōthēsetai:** This is a verb and is third person singular, future indicative, passive from the root *sōzō* meaning to save, preserve, rescue, will be saved, etc. This is also a predicative future. At the back of Paul's mind as he uses this word is the idea of "to save, preserve from transcendent danger or destruction, save/preserve from eternal death."<sup>25</sup> This idea is replete in both OT and NT books like Isa 10:22; 1Cor 3:15; Rom 9:27. In using the above two predicative future verbs (*zemioō* and *sōzō*), Paul reminds all ministers that on the day of the Lord, it is either one suffers the loss of one's product and has gratuitous salvation only or one gain both one's product and gratuitous salvation. He intends also to make the faithful appreciate their ministers as mediators who will be rewarded either positively or negatively on the day of the Lord. For Paul, if Corinthian Christians understand this hard reality and live it out, then he would willingly address them as the *pneumatikois* – the Spirit-filled and mature Christians or as those who understand the essence of Christianity.

### Structural Analysis of 1 Cor 3:1-15

The text could be structured as follows: (i) Infants in the Faith (Vv 1-4); (ii) Cooperative roles of ministers (Vv 5-9); (iii) The Architectural metaphor (Vv10-12); (iv)The day of reckoning (Vv 13-15). The author now considers them one after the other.

**Infants in the Faith (Vv 1-4):** Here Paul is very blunt and sharp in his sarcasm as he addresses the Corinthians. He begins by speaking their language in 2: 6-16 thus explaining the true wisdom of God and later turns them against them in 3:1-4. The Corinthians claim to be mature (2:6) in spiritual things but Paul looks at them as those who are still "infants in Christ." Hence he writes, "brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). They are infants otherwise they would have understood that they belong to the same body of Christ. Hence, there would be no division among them. This

<sup>24</sup>Barreth, C.K (1968), The First Epistle to the Corinthians, 82

<sup>25</sup>Gaston, D.(1963) A Companion to 1 Corinthians, 34.

implies that if they are of the same stock and are aware of that then there would not be strife, jealousy, dissension, or party spirit in their midst.

Paul seems to be confrontational because he knows the source of the strife, jealousy, or dissension. Some of them taunted him because he was not eloquent and lacks a commanding presence. They look at him as a third-rate philosopher and found his teaching over simple. For that those who fancy themselves as intellectuals or had ecstatic visions turn to other teachers thereby leaning on their unredeemed natural inclinations.<sup>26</sup> It is because of this inclination that Paul calls them carnal people. No wonder then that he had to feed them with milk and never solid food and emphasizes, “even now they are not yet ready for it” (1 Cor. 3:2.) For Paul as long as they still rally around certain ministers like Paul or Apollos, they are still infants that need milk. Three times Paul draws attention to the fact that the Corinthians are carnal people as opposed to the spiritual namely (i) in the opening antithesis of verse one, (ii) in an explanatory affirmation of verse 3a, and in (iii) the rhetorical question of verse 3b. Paul treats fleshly life as life, which simply accepts psychophysical existence as regulative for conduct.<sup>27</sup> In his epistles he has variously dealt with fleshly life – Rom 8: 1-17; Gal 5:13-26; 2Cor 16:1-6.

The implication of referring to them as fleshly people is synonymous with saying that Corinthians are living outside the Christian way of life. For it is never right for one to claim that he belongs to one minister or the other. Hence for Paul, the absolute dependence of Corinthian Christians on Christ is the mark of maturity which is maturity in the faith. The essential point in the Corinthian community is that the dissension, strife, or jealousy was not between the ministers but among the Corinthians; which means there is nothing wrong between Paul and Apollos;<sup>28</sup> their relationship with one another is still Christian, and cordial despite all odds or despite the temptation Corinthian Christians had wanted to drag them to.

Most scholars see “milk” as Paul uses it to mean “the lesson of the cross and its immediate results – repentance, the promise of pardon, the call to holiness.”<sup>29</sup> These provide the right nourishment in the early days of the Christian life and are the milk for babes (Heb 5:11-6:21). Whereas the “solid” food for the mature is the “wisdom of God,” which could be elaborated into “predestination, eschatology, the resurrection.”<sup>30</sup> These constitute the main dishes, which Paul could not give to the infants. In 1 Cor. 3:1-4 Paul insists that the hallmark of the spirit is love; where there is no strife, jealousy, party spirit, and dissension. The absence of love mocks the conceit and pretensions of the Corinthians.<sup>31</sup> As long as they continue to live like ordinary men

<sup>26</sup> Gaston, D.(1963), 34.

<sup>27</sup> Laymon, C. (1984) Ed. Interpreter’s Concise Commentary, Acts & Paul’s Letters vol vii, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 194.

<sup>28</sup> Getty, M.A (2003) First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, New Testament, vol 7, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press,23.

<sup>29</sup> Harrington, D. (1999), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Harrington, D. (1999),45.

<sup>31</sup> Getty, M.A (2003), 23.

and women who harbour strife and party spirit they remain infants who need milk; though physically they look like adults.

**Cooperative Roles of Ministers (Vv 5-9):** This is the centre of this work. Corinthian Christians set the ministers up in opposition to each other and try to make them rivals. But the maturity, which Paul manifests in 1 Cor. 3:5-4:5, shows that the Corinthians did not succeed because Paul and Apollos as ministers are no longer infants in the faith. Two of them know clearly what their relationship with one another is all about as well as their relationship with the Corinthian Christians and invariably with God. The Corinthians out of ignorance was exaggerating the importance of the apostles and tried to persuade them to be jealous of one another, so Paul did not mince words but clearly explains to them: “What is Apollos? What is Paul?” (v.5a). For Paul, they are nothing other than servants through whom the Corinthians came to believe (v.5b).

So using the imagery of farming, Paul emphasizes the unity and cooperation that characterizes the task and common goals of the ministers.<sup>32</sup> The work was well divided according to the capabilities God gave to each of the ministers. Paul has the responsibility of laying the foundation for the faith. And Apollos has the duty of sustaining the faith already founded. God himself gives the actual growth (V6). The ministers work towards a common end, therefore, their followers must not set them up to compete against one another. For the apostles are not competitors but collaborators in the field of God. Their role should be seen as complementary to each other’s roles. Paul and Apollos work side by side but the power comes from God and the whole enterprise belongs to God. If the Corinthians understood this fact then there would be no room for a personality cult.

Paul and indeed his fellow workers like Apollos, Barnabas, and others are conscious always that the messengers or ministers should be merged in the message they bring. The aim is for the glory to be God’s; and the vision of the living Christ should be unshadowed by the interposition of any of his agents no matter how gifted or impressive either in speech or appearance or both he/ she might appear.<sup>33</sup> It once happened at Lystra, where the healing of a cripple as well as the preaching of Paul and Barnabas attracted offering of sacrifice (divine honours) to the apostles. But they tore their clothes to prove the fact that they were mere humans like any of them; thus proving that they were only the representatives of Christ or that they know clearly who they were. Hence all honour and adoration should belong to him (Acts 14:8-18) and not to any megalomaniac.

The ministers or servants are trustees of the gospel and the essence of trusteeship is to be disinterested. Though the messenger is important the gospel is what really matters the most.<sup>34</sup> Paul as well as Apollos is aware of this hard truth. They did everything to live it out. The problem at Corinth did not originate from them but rather from the Corinthians. But instead of Paul and

<sup>32</sup> Gaston, D.(1963),34.

<sup>33</sup> Harrington, D. (1999), 45.

<sup>34</sup> Laverdiere, E. (1980) The Invitation to the New Testament Epistles, Garden City, New York, Image books, 84.



Apollos allowing the mob or those guided by their unredeemed natural inclination to drag or pull them down; they visited them with blunt catechesis. Paul, therefore, concludes, “For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field” (v.9a). Though Paul was the first to preach in Corinth and Apollos came after him; this does not make the community either to belong to him or to Apollos but to God and God alone.

**The Architectural Metaphor (Vv 10-12):** Paul changes his simile from a garden/field to a house/building and at the same time he defines his own special mission. As a skilled master builder, he laid the foundations of the house (v.10). The Corinthians are God’s building and the actual foundation is Christ himself. This means he (Christ) founded the church through Paul and those who came after him.

Paul is aware that the laying of the foundation is not the whole work. Later, workers must come and continue the work already started (V10b.) The later workers must avoid the pitfall of replacing the foundation which is Christ with their worldly ambitions. They must avoid also the pitfall of building with any type of material.<sup>35</sup> These pitfalls are summarized in the motive surrounding any missionary work and never on the quantity of the work done. In other to make the builders conscious of the type of materials to be used, Paul lists the building materials he knew in decreasing order of value namely, gold, silver, jewels, wood, or straw. Paul is a foundation layer and was always on the move. He was eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11), three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), he was only a few weeks in Thessalonica laying foundations for the faith. Both the one who lays the foundation and the one who builds are working for the same owner. It is not for the Corinthians to discriminate between the ministers. It belongs to God. God does not judge mankind by comparing them with each other. He will reward each man according to his task and the resources he/she has been given. Each shall receive his/her reward according to his /her labour. Hence only God knows a man’s true worth.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Day of Reckoning Vv13-15**

In 1 Cor 13:13, Paul presents us with the three things that will last namely faith, hope, and charity. Whereas in Gal 5:20 he presents unchristian attitudes that will not last namely strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, and party spirit. These are worthless materials that may not withstand the heat of the “fire” on the day of the Lord. Fire is the symbol of divine judgment (Matt 5:22; 25:41; Heb 10:27; Rev 19:20). Fire is used to get rid of worthless rubbish.<sup>37</sup> The fire metaphor is easily applied to the image of a building. This implies that, on the Day of Judgment, fire will reveal the worthlessness or usefulness of the works of various ministers. Hence, Paul

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<sup>35</sup>Gaston, D.(1963),37.

<sup>36</sup>. Gaston, D.(1963), 38.

<sup>37</sup>The NT speaks of the fire of Gehenna, the public rubbish dump of Jerusalem where all the refuse of the city was destroyed. This thus becomes the symbol of the final annihilation of all that God will condemn as unfit for the heavenly Jerusalem. (Gaston D.(1963),39.)

Gaston, D.(1963),37.

makes an explicit warning against an anonymous “anyone” who presumes to build upon the foundation he has laid. He assures them that the particular building materials with which “anyone” builds will determine whether the builder will receive a reward or not. Of course, the builder himself will “be saved,” no matter what but only “as through fire” (V15.)<sup>38</sup> This goes a long way to show that the salvation of God’s ministers/ servants depends on God’s grace and not necessarily on his/her work. This implies that one has to be conscious of personal responsibility for all of one’s actions. It is most likely that at this stage Paul is no longer thinking of himself and Apollos but of his successors in Corinth. On the day of the Lord, all enmities, boasting, selfish achievements, pharisaic good works, and other sins of the flesh will be exposed and destroyed by the fire of judgment.

Paul is of the opinion that all judgment should be left to God. He knows the heart of all. The value of the work of each builder will be revealed by fire. God knows how to bring about this eschatological reality. He has not transferred this right to any community or to any minister to carry on for him. What is needed most from every minister is to delight in the effective existence of “Christ’s building.” If the Corinthian ministers and Christians are aware of this simple truth, then all strife, jealousy, party spirit, or dissension will die away, and “love” which is the hallmark of believers will radiate everywhere.

### **Collaboration Among Priests**

79.2% of our parishes are manned by more than one priest. It is only about 20.8% of our parishes are being ministered by just a priest. This will go a long way to underscore the fact that in the old Awka diocese, there are still very few parishes being manned by a priest. From the writer's own observation, the parishes with only one priest do not necessarily mean a lack of manpower though it is a minute part of it, it is largely due to the size of the parishes in question. Giving example with old Awka diocese, I have this to submit, according to the 2019 old Awka diocesan Liturgical Diary, 57 Parishes and Chaplaincies out of 187 Parishes have one priest each whereas 95 of them have two priests; 27 parishes have three priests living in their rectories; 7 of them have four priests living together in their rectory; and only one parish, St. Mary's Catholic Church Awka as in 2019 has 5 priests living together. It is a sign that in no distant future, the diocese may be forced to pair priests no matter the size of the parishes in question but according to the size of the rectory.<sup>39</sup> If this being equal, priests/ministers of today must learn how to accommodate one another as co-workers or collaborators. They must also understand that they were all called individually to work in the Lord's vineyard. They must also understand that they are all serving the same Master who calls and owns the ministry. They must understand that each

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<sup>38</sup>Horsley, R. (1998), 65.

<sup>39</sup>ADLIC (2019). Diary/Directory 2018-2019, Fides Communications Okpuno, Awka, 40-59.

will be rewarded at the end of the day according to the quality of work each did. Most importantly, each of the present-day ministers must realize that one's position does not matter, what matters is the quality of one's contribution to the building up of the body of Christ, the Church.

**Recommendation:** Every intending minister or aspirant must be made to understand what his vocation is all about which includes understanding the meaning of the Church, who is the head of the Church, and what he is trying to become. That means, he must know that God called him in Christ to be a worker, a servant working for God through Christ to build up the body of Christ and He is the one to reward him based on the quality of his work. Again, an aspirant must be someone who has a collaborative spirit so as to accommodate one another under the same roof and Church working collaboratively with one another.