PERSPECTIVES ON CHURCH GIVING IN GOMBE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Research Problem:
Previous studies about tithing and seed sowing have emphasized a lot on the theology of the practice, the benefits of paying and the disadvantages of defaulting vis-à-vis the scriptural legislation. Beyond the aforesaid, there now exists issues and questions relating to the morality of the practice. These are about the appropriateness and efficacy of the act. This paper therefore examined these issues with a view to identifying the perceptions, receptions and the motives of the givers and the skeptics.

Methods:
Three denominations in Gombe city were selected for the study namely the Mainline (Catholic Church), the Evangelical (Evangelical Church Winning All, aka ECWA) and the Pentecostal (The Living Faith Church). These churches were purposively sampled for primary data gathering. A questionnaire was distributed to one hundred and fifty (150) purposively selected respondents across the three denominations per block, fifty (50) copies per each denomination. Secondary data was gathered through the review of textbooks, journal articles, projects/theses, bulletins, pamphlets, diaries, and Nigerian newspapers, among other sources. Data was analyzed using simple percentages, content analysis, and ethnographic summaries.

Results:
About perceptions, many Christians considered tithe and seed offering as obligatory and a ritual to be carried out even if no reward accrues. Some of them see the reward as heavenly treasured while others believe the rewards are both here and hereafter.They believed that there are consequences for defaulting. Skeptics believed that church leaders have

unduly manipulated this means of funding to exploit gullible contemporary Christians. Payers' responses towards tithing demonstrated that Christian sought to pay and not question or doubt the giving legislation.Skeptics felt thatparting with one-tenth of income was economically unrealistic today, not to mention the inordinate and selfish expenditure of the fundsby church leadership. They also claimed that tithing was only ingrained in the Old Testament, whereas not emphasized in the New Testament as a legal command. Tithe payers are motivated by reward, spiritual fulfilment and love of God to be able to offer it. Skeptics feel that God neither needs nor spend money and God would not solicit for man's commitment by testing his greed or generosity. They further felt that the practice had outlived its age and was now used by the contemporary church to exploit givers.

Conclusion:

This study revealed the perspectives of church giving, while portraying a rather objective picture of how church givers think, what skeptics feel and how to perpetuate church giving in an increasingly challenging economy as Nigeria's. Giving of tithes, offering, seed sowing and first fruit generally have spiritual connotations and interpretations.Givers or donors operate within these compasses.Donors and church leaders will continually be challenged at convincing skeptics when allegations of misuse, exploitation and insincerity of fund disbursement are unresolved. Transparency should therefore be encouraged in relation to collection and disbursement of church offerings.

1.1 Introduction

The ongoing discourse within the Nigerian church landscape revolves around the polarizing issues of tithes and other types of offerings thatinclude seed sowing.These have garnered widespread attention across social and print media. This divisive debate pits conservative traditionalists, staunchly advocating for the perpetuation of these practices as binding laws for Christians, against the reformist dispensationalists who contend for their discontinuation, asserting that the requirements of the law have been fulfilled through Jesus (Croteau 1-3).Delving into the historical backdrop, scholars, including Warren (1993, cited in Ehioghae 144), have grappled with similar theological questions.

This intellectual tug-of-war led to the rejection of tithe practices in Europe, only to witness a resurgence between 1873 and 1906, catalyzed by influential writings acknowledged as "the foundations for the tithing movement" (Croteau 30). Notably, Henry Lansdell's seminal work, "The Sacred Tenth" (1906), stands as a cornerstone in this revival, earning him the distinguished title of "the father of modern tithe" (Croteau 32-36).

Despite these historical antecedents, a recent wave of scriptural intellectualists, aptly labeled "Modern Renaissancts" by Ogunrinade, challenges the traditional narrative, vehemently asserting the absence of scriptural basis for tithe or seed sowings among followers of Christ. Ogunrinade draws parallels between this contemporary intellectual movement and the

14th-century renaissance period, highlighting a shift from questioning the church's interpretation of scripture to a more profound critical scrutiny of scripture itself (Ogunrinade, Lecture).

The fervor and ubiquity of these debates across diverse regions and denominations underscore the urgency of this research undertaking.In the Renaissance period, what sparked the debate was as a result of wanting to know the difference between what the scripture was taught about the subject and what the church wanted the laity to know. However, the current issues that surround tithes and offering vis-à-vis the current economic crunches experienced by Nigerians are alleged to be a factor for the heating of the debate at the moment. Existing works and reviews on church tithing and offerings have not however, examined the perceptions of the donors who believe in the observance of this practice and the skeptics who are actually questioning and their rationale for doing so at this material moment.This is the gap that this study has identified to fill.

From the theological aspect, scholars such as Babbs (24-197), Peck (12-92), and Rigby (17-20) have investigated and focus their writings on paying tithe and sowing seed as duty and obedience to God's command, while scholars like Vischer (9-12), Babbs (24-30) and Lansdell (1952; cited in Croteau 31-34), concentrated their interest work on the historical perspective. Adeboye (2011:53), Oyedepo (2011:91), Smith (1971:73), and Roberts (1985:13) on the other hand have focused more on the individual beneficial aspects of tithe and offering. This particular aspect is the reason why certain critical views are arising to question the validity of paying tithes and offerings. These critics claimed to have observed that churches and Christian spiritual leaders in contemporary Nigeria have unduly emphasized this financial means in their teachings and are indeed garnering financial benefits at the expenses of gullible followers who bear the brunt. This research therefore examines the economic issues surrounding tithes and offerings in Nigeria (especially Gombe) with a view to identifying the feelings of the payers in line with their motivations,possible rewards and (or) regrets.Existing literature has not dealt with this area before now, therefore making this work important now and bridging this gap in scholarship.

The general objective of this research is to investigate the trending issues concerning tithes and offerings.The first specific objective is to examine the meaning and features of tithing and seed sowing as in the scripture while the second is to empirically investigate the perception, reception and preference of Christians in some church denominations about tithes and offering.

This paper examined the perceptions of both the donors and the skeptics of tithes, offerings and seeds payment in the church as to their understanding of the practice, their reactions to it and their motives for payment or otherwise, so as to determine the prospect of this practice in the coming years.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Why would a seemingly old and well acceptable exercise of church giving in form of tithes, seed-sowing now become a questionable concept among Christians in Nigeria today? Existing studies and issuesabout tithing and seed sowing have focused on the theological perspectiveand the corresponding rewards that accrue as a result of obeyingstrictly this scriptural legislation. There now exist some controversies on the obligation, efficacy, relevance, and the morality of this practice and the use of the proceeds. There had not however been particular scholarly attention given to the aforementioned thereby

heightening the controversies and aggravating the ambiguities that already exist. This paper therefore examined the issues in Gombe with a view to identifying the commitments of the church givers, the worthiness and importance of the payment and the morality associated with it in an increasingly challenging economy. This is with a view to highlighting the prospect of this practice in the church in the nearest future.

1.3 Research Objective

i. To identify why payers of tithes and offering are doing it committedly and as well why skeptics are questioning this practice today

ii. To investigate the worthiness or importance the payers of tithes and offering attach to fulfilling this obligation

iii. To examine the motives of the donors or givers of tithes and offering and also that of the skeptics whodoubted this practice

1.4 Research Methodology

To carry these out, threechurch denominations were selected for the study namely the Mainline (Catholic Church), the Evangelical (Evangelical Church Winning All, aka ECWA) and the Pentecostal (The Living Faith Church). These churches were purposively sampled for primary data gathering.The research instrumentfor primary data collection was structured questionnaires. A questionnaire was distributed to one hundred and fifty (150) purposively selected respondents across the three denominations per block, fifty (50) copies per each denomination. Secondary data was gathered through the review of textbooks, journal articles, projects/theses, bulletins, pamphlets, diaries, and Nigerian newspapers, among other sources. Data was analyzed using simple percentages, content analysis, and ethnographic summaries. The chosen churches are renowned for having significant number of the educated, business and salary earners classes from different ethnic backgrounds of the country.The timeframe for the research being 2013 to 2023, aligned with the period when these arguments gained prominence across the diverse media. This study may provide some clarity and new insight to strengthen the existing body of knowledge on the topic.

1.5 Conceptual Clarification

Church Offering

For the sake of this study at this material time, a church offering should be seen as a financial gift that is voluntarily given or donated. Though offering in a broader context includes donation of other resources such as time, talents and material goods, its meaning for this work shall be restricted to financial gifts. It is the fund given to tangibly express a believer's faith, trust, and commitment for God's love and for the furtherance of the growth of His work. This term "offering" is used in this work to represent all the donations described in this work such as tithes, seed sowing or seed-faith, first fruit and others.

2.1 Broad Concept of Offering

The term "offering," derived from "offer," refers to the act of giving something to someone, commonly used by religious practitioners to signify a gift presented, especially to God (Hornby 2016; cited in Kitause and Achunike 8). Kitause and Achunike distinguish offering from tithing, asserting that offering involves voluntary giving after the payment of tithes (8). The

Oxford English Dictionary Online on the other hand defines offering as "something presented or sacrificed to God, a god, a saint, etc., in worship or devotion; a thing given as an expression of religious homage; a sacrifice; an oblation" (Cited in Oras 127). Merriam-Webster characterizes it as the act of presenting something, especially a ceremonially offered sacrifice as part of worship, or a contribution for supporting a church or religious institution (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Some scholars in their own rights generally equate the term "offering" with "sacrifice," although there is disagreement regarding the overall relationship between these concepts. Baaren suggests that offering constitutes the material element of sacrifice (Cited in Oras 130). He further explains that the differentiation and use of these terms in specific cases depend on the writer's perspective and context (130). Garrett contends that the Old Testament revolves around a system of sacrificial offerings administered by priests to atone for the sins of Israel. These include the burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering, purification offering, and reparation offering. In contemporary times, various types of offerings are generally raised or collected in churches globally, and in Nigeria. According to Garrett, Kitause, and Achunike, these offerings are given different names that includefree-will offering given in church worship, kingdom promotion offeringfor supporting God's work on earth (such as building projects), prophetic offering for anointed messengers, needy offering for assisting the poor, sacrificial offering for financial transformation or church building, and thanksgiving offering for appreciating God for answered prayers or breakthroughs. Additionally, there are the offerings of tithes and seed sowings(Garrett n.p, Kitause and Achunike 12) that constitute the focus of this paper.

2.2 Historical and Scriptural Concepts of Tithe

According to Ademiluka, the Hebrew noun *Ma'aser*is 'tenth-part' means 'tithe' in English. It is a cognate of the verb 'to tithe' or 'take the tenth part' (288). Askinglot asserts that "The Old English term for tithe is from *teogoþa,* meaning 'tenth' (n.p). He continued that it is a one-tenth part of something paid as a contribution to a religious organization or compulsory tax to government." Ademiluka cites Tate who defines tithe as "the giving or taking of a 'tenth part' of a property, produce or money for some institution or purpose" (288). For Oyedepo, tithing is a systematic release of the tenth of all your increase to God, or special portion of one's increase which God has reserved for Himself (Cited in Kitause and Achunike 8). We perceive that the various definitions of tithes that are represented here are not so different from what every Christian believes it to mean. We also opine that the definition by Oyedepo here are of two versions, the first as the one-tenth of income while the second is not quantified. He describes the second as a special portion which may even be morethan one-tenth. This agrees with what obtains in contemporary Christianity today especially among the Pentecostals that baby Christians pay one-tenth while a deep-rooted one pays more. This is another expression of enhanced level of commitment of church giving that is being debated today. We are also of the impression that this kind of tithing is unexplainable how someone would give more than one-tenth of income, maybe two-tenth or four-tenth and without collapsing economically.

Historically, the tradition of tithing has roots in the ancient Near East, where offerings of goods or a tenth part of designated items were presented to deities (Ottuh and Eboh 3). According to Snoeberger, this practice has a long history, observed forcenturies by both

pagans and biblical figures alike (Snoeberger 71). Lindell, as cited by Snoeberger, argues that tithing existed in various ancient cultures, including Roman, Greek, Carthaginian, Cretan, Silician, Phoenician, Chinese, Babylonian, Akkadian, and Egyptian, reaching back to the earliest written records of human history (Landsell 1-38; cited in Snoeberger 71). Ottuh and Eboh support this notion, noting that paying a 'tenth' in the Ancient Near East was common, often given to kings and royal temples, extending across Mesopotamia, Syrian-Palestine, Greece, and even as far west as the Phoenician city of Carthage (Eliad 1987; cited in Ottuh and Eboh 3). This suggests that the practice of tithing did not originate with Abraham, transcending religious boundaries to become a secular practice as well.

Tithing, a practice predating Abraham's call, may not have originated with Genesis 14:20, considering Abraham's previous pagan associations. Examining Genesis 14:20, it appears Abraham tithed on behalf of the kings rather than for himself, as the plundered possessions belonged to Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 14:22-23). Despite Abraham's oath not to accept anything, he returned ninety percent to the kings. Nally suggests Abraham's tenth-giving was voluntary, akin to a thanksgiving rather than a compulsory payment (n.p). This echoes Jacob's commitment in Genesis 28:22, promising a full tenth to God in gratitude for protection and prosperity.

During the time of Moses, tithes were mandated by God, requiring ten percent of agricultural produce, emphasizing gratitude and recognition of God as the source and owner of blessings (Lev 27:30-32). This offering served the Levitical priesthood, festivals, and the needy (Num 18:20-32). Deuteronomy 12:11 indicated that tithing was to be practiced in the land God would designate, with its enforcement starting after the Israelites entered this promised land (Exodus 28:1-4). Despite the establishment of priesthood and Levitical order during the journey, tithing was not observed during the exilic period (Schreiner n.p). Nehemiah later reinstated tithing laws post-exile (Nehemiah 10, 12, 13), warned against by Amos and Malachi (Amos 4:4-10, Malachi 3:8-12). Ademiluka highlights in Malachi 3:8-12 that Israelites faced consequences like crop failure for neglecting tithes and offerings. Malachi 10:8-12 is the sternest tithe law, threatening severe consequences for non-compliance. Arguments surrounding these verses will be discussed subsequently (Ademiluka 285).

The New Testament, particularly the Epistles, is notably quiet on the subject of tithing. Jesus, in two statements (Matt 23:23 [parallels Luke 11:42] and Luke 18:12), addressed tithing, sparking debates between supporters and opponents. The Apostles, with the exception of Hebrews, remained largely silent on the matter, using it in Hebrews 7:5-10 to illustrate Melchizedek's priesthood. Notably, Matthew 23:23 has been a source of controversy, fueling debates on tithing. The post-biblical period saw a continuation of this discourse, with early church fathers divided—some advocating for tithing, while others were calling for its cessation (Kitause and Achunike 9).

Croteau offers a comprehensive, impartial view on tithing, exploring various arguments. In the Ante-Nicene period (100-325), he notes discussions by Clement of Rome and Justin Martyr, highlighting offerings in the early church that align more with a First Corinthians 16 model of giving, as opposed to a strict tithing approach (8-9).His analysis of various church Fathers' perspectives reveals a spectrum of views on tithing. Hewrites:

Irenaeus believed that Jesus nullified tithing, and Tertullian's depiction of giving contradicts the notion of obligatory Christian tithing. Origen explicitly mentioned his non-tithing practice, while Cyprian's remarks suggest that tithing wasn't prevalent in his era. The DidascaliaApostlorum outrightly stated that Christians weren't obligated to tithe or give first fruits. Jerome (385) and Augustine (400) endorsed tithing but considered it a compromise compared to the New Testament's directive to sell possessions for the benefit of the poor. Ambrose (374) and John Chrysostom (375) asserted the obligation of tithing, whereas Epiphanius (370) likened tithing to circumcision, not binding on Christians, though he endorsed first fruits and oblations (Cited in Croteau 9-11).

From the analysis above, it can be deduced that tithing was not obligated in the New Testament as in the Old Testament. It is also from this view that those who argue that tithing is inappropriate because it is not reinforced in the New Testament are drawing their strength.

Croteau extensively chronicles the historical evolution of tithing, noting that after the church Fathers, the apostolic successors remained silent on the matter. The practice resurfaced in 585 AD after the Second Synod of Macon declared tithing as an "obligatory Christian practice" (Croteau 12). During the Middle Ages (604-1517), tithing shifted from a custom endorsed by church law to becoming mandatory under state law, advocated by figures like Charlemagne, Offa, William the Conqueror, and Bernard of Clairvaux (Cited in Croteau 12-13). Popes established tithing laws, but dissent existed, with Thomas Aquinas, John Wycliff, and John Huss offering different perspectives (Croteau 13).

In the Reformation period (1517-1648), opposition to tithing emerged, with peasants in Germany, Martin Luther, and Anabaptists rejecting its binding nature (Croteau 13:14). Ambiguity surrounded Huldreich Zwingli's and John Calvin's views, with Zwingli eventually accepting tithing, while Calvin's contemporaries like the Anabaptists rejected it (Croteau 16-17). Post-Reformation (1648-1873) saw diverse opinions, from Roger Williams advocating for ministers' voluntary support to John Milton opposing the tithe. John Wesley called for sacrificial giving, not strictly ten percent, and the English Parliament acknowledged ministerial support but rejected tithing as an eternal law. Quakers, English Baptists, and others also rejected the practice (Croteau 17-20).

In the late 17th century, ministerial support shifted to taxes, and by the 19th century, tithing ceased, marked by the Tithe Act of 1836 in England. In the United States, Newton J. Brown's 1833 dictionary explicitly stated that tithes had ceased. However, in the late 19th century, modern tithing resurged due to scholarly work, leading to renewed agitation for its practice (Cited in Croteau 28-36).Tithe has persisted as a church doctrine, deemed a mandatory divine command binding on all Christians to this day (Croteau 36-44). In contemporary times, especially in Africa, certain denominations provide record booklets for tithe payments, suggesting a meticulous approach to its observance (Cited in Kitause and Achunike 12). Some go further; asserting that violating this practice may incur severe punishments, including curses, hindrance in material progress, and even death (11-12). Notably, some pastors teach that tithe payment serves as a passport to heaven, emphasizing its spiritual significance (Cited in Kitause and Achunike 13). These extreme views raise questions about the insistence on the practice, prompting debates and counter-debates in response to recent global and Nigerian media outbursts (Ehioghae 146). It

is also from these various prevailing views about this topic that we saw the need to weigh in and examine the perception of donors in Nigeria and Gombe in the midst of all the debates that are raging already.

2.3 Arguments about Tithing

The ongoing debate on tithing, existing for centuries in Christian circles, has intensified in the last decade, possibly fueled by the internet, leading to divisions within the global and specifically Nigerian church. One perspective contends that tithing was exclusively for the land of Israel and the people of Israel under the Law of Moses, citing references in Deuteronomy 12:6, 11, and Nehemiah (10, 11, 12, and 13). This group argues for discontinuity, emphasizing that the church has expanded beyond the boundaries of the Promised Land under the law of Christ (Rom 6:14), with Colossians 2:14 emphasizing the cancellation of the written code and its regulations against the church. Hebrews 7:12 supports this view by stating, "When the priesthood changed, the law must be changed also." Malachi 3:8-12 is seen as applicable only to the people of Israelites under the Law of Moses, which even modern Israelites no longer observe (Bamfo-Darko).

On the other hand, proponents of continuity argue that the church is the new Israel, asserting that all promises from the Old Testament remain valid for the church (Mayo). This group contends that tithing predates the Mosaic Law, as evidenced by Abraham's tithe payment before the institution of the law. Matthew 5:17 is cited to emphasize Jesus' statement that he did not come to abolish the law, asserting its continued relevance until fulfillment. Infantado asserts the inspiration and binding nature of all scripture on Christians, irrespective of Old or New Testament (2 Tim 3:16). Obembe sees tithing not only as a legal obligation but as a spiritual act of worship, honor, and obedience to God, emphasizing Jesus' endorsement of the practice in Matthew 23:23 (parallels Luke 11:42). The statement "you should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former" is interpreted as Jesus recommending the continuation of the practice (Mayo).Some renowned Nigerian church leaders are quoted to have made the following assertions:

Anyone who is not paying his or her tithes fully is not going to Heaven. Some people have taught you that if you do not pay your tithes, God will not give you blessings. This is true, but a little more serious. You do not pay your tithes; you do not go to Heaven. Why? Because there are no robbers in Heaven. The Bible calls those who do not pay their tithes robbers in Malachi 3:8…Tithing is an inescapable covenant obligation. Without it, God has no access to you, because his law states that there can be no harvest without first planting a seed (Cited in kitause and Achunike 11-14).

The discourse on tithing among Nigerian church leaders extends beyond temporal blessings, with some suggesting that it can impact salvation and serve as insurance against poverty and destruction. Conversely, those arguing for discontinuity point to Matthew 23:23, asserting that Jesus did not endorse tithing (Ademiluka 297; in Schreiner n.p). This perspective maintains that at the time when Jesus made the statement, the new covenant had not commenced (Matt 26:26-28). Ehioghae questions the relevance of tithing for contemporary Christians, deeming it an anachronism, no longer obligatory after Christ's event (147). Schreiber argues that Jesus, being born a Jew under the law, fulfilled its requirements and that the Apostles' teachings confirm the discontinuity with the law (Romans 3:19-21, 4:14, Ephesians 2:15, Hebrew 7:11-12, 7:18-19, 8:7, 8:13). Quoting 2 Corinthian 3:6, Schreiber asserts the competence of ministers

under the new covenant, not bound by the letter but the Spirit.Others contend that the context of Matthew 23 depicts Jesus condemning tithe practitioners within the seven woes, supported by Luke 18:12. They question the absence of tithe in the Jerusalem council discussions (Acts 15) and argue that the Apostles' silence on the matter weakens the pro-tithing stance (Hetrick n.p). Hetrick emphasizes that the Apostles extensively wrote about financial matters but never mentioned or taught tithe. Some scholars counter this silence argument, stating that the New Testament's apparent silence doesn't validate the cessation of a practice, citing John 21:25, which acknowledge Jesus' many unrecorded actions (Ogunrinaden.p). In essence, the debate over tithe payment is deeply rooted in Christian history, reflecting diverse perspectives on its continuity or discontinuity.

2.4 The Concept of Seed Sowing

The concept of seed sowing in Christianity is equally a contentious issue, sparking debates among various Christian schools and theologians. Unlike tithing, the practice of seed sowing lacks explicit biblical substantiation. Proponents of this practice often point to Genesis 8:22, stating, "As long as the earth endures 'seed times and harvest,'cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease," as a foundational scripture for the doctrine of seed-faith (Kitause and Achunike 10). Additionally, scriptures like Luke 6:38 and Acts 20:35 are frequently cited in the promotion of seed sowings. The terminology for this practice includes "seed faith" or "seed of faith" (Kitause and Achunike 8). Akabike, Ngwoke, and Chukwuma define seed sowing as the belief that significant monetary or property offerings can prompt God to fulfill ones desires (3).

While there is no recorded historical evidence pinpointing the exact origin of the Christian practice of seed sowings, scholars generally agree that it gained prominence among Nigerian Pentecostal worshippers and likely entered the Christian religious landscape with the Word Faith Movement between the 19th and 20th centuries (Akabike, Ngwoke, and Chukwuma 3; Kitause and Achunike 10). The Word Faith Movement, also known as the Faith Movement, Faith-Formula, Word of Faith, Hyper Faith, Positive Confession, Name it and Claim it, or Health and Wealth Gospel, includes prominent figures like Kenneth Erwin Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Oral Robert, Robert Tilton, Charles Capps, Frederick K.C. Price, John Avanzini, among others, as its proponents (Kitause and Achunike 10).Kitause and Achunikewrites:

> The principle of seed-faith is applied when a person is confronted with seemingly insurmountable problem that has defied all solutions. It is applied when a person has a need or wants a breakthrough in any life challenge, then; one sows a seed-of-faith to a 'man of God' in requesting his prayers, specifically for the need in question. The sowing of seed goes with naming the seed in faith that is attaching the seed to a particular problem that demands a solution. It is believed that such 'anointed prayers' of the 'man of God' will address the problem squarely. Similarly, seeds are sometimes equally sown towards a particular project in the church to provoke certain blessing (12).

Seed sowing is typically approached with a willing and cheerful spirit, characterized by a bountiful expression of faith. According to Kitause and Achunike, after the initial act of generous giving with enthusiasm, the subsequent step involves continuous nurturing of the seeds. This involves a process of positive confession, claiming what rightfully belongs to the individual, and maintaining a steadfast belief in

the principles of seed faith (12). The prevailing belief is that individuals who demonstrate faith through seed sowings are more likely to experience prosperity compared to those who do not engage in this practice (Akabike, Ngwoke, and Chukwuma 3).

3.0 Analysis of Findings and Discussions

Here, the field study results are discussed, covering the following main segments namely:should it be made compulsory or optional",“does payment of tithes and sowing seeds yield varying benefits",“could neglecting them entail consequences" and, whether there should be transparency about how the proceeds is used.

3.1 Offerings in form of tithe payments and seed sowings should bemade compulsory or optional

Table 1: Every Christian is scripturally obliged to pay tithes and sow seeds

Label	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	127	87.0
Disagree	17	12.0
Indifferent	2	1.0
Total	146	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

The data presented in the table underscores a strong consensus among respondents, with 87.0% agreeing that tithe payments and seed sowings are rooted in scripture, thereby considering them obligatory within the church. Conversely, a minority of 12.0% disagrees with this perspective, while only 1.0% remains indifferent. The analysis encompasses a total of 146 respondents, comprising 80 (56.0%) males and 66 (45.0%) females. This data shows that the obligatory nature of paying tithes and sowing seed is popular among Christians in Gombe.

3.2 Paying tithes and sowing seeds yield varying benefits, while neglecting them entails consequences

Here, respondents reacted to whether tithing and seed sowing could result ingrowth, enhanced protection and lesser life crisis or non-payment could lead to adverse consequences. The responses of the respondents are outlined in the table below:

Table 2: Tithing and seed sowingenhances prosperity

Label	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	99	68.0
Disagree	42	29.0
Indifferent	5	3.0
Total	146	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

A dominant sentiment is evident among respondents in the above table, with 68.0% agreeingwhile 29.0% of respondents disagreeing and 3.0% remaining indifferent. This result

shows that many Christians in Gombe feel that by engaging in these forms of church giving, there could be positive changes in their finances and economies.

3.3 A Christian should not be inquisitive about grey areas surrounding tithing and offerings.

This section concentrates on analyzing responses regarding rights to ask questions about tithing and seed sowing. This research question becomes necessary as questions are arising about the practice while the posture of responses provided is either evasive or confrontational. The summarized responses are presented in the following table:

Table 3: Christians need not question the appropriateness or otherwise of tithing and seed sowing

Label	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	88	60.0
Disagree	48	33.0
Indifferent	10	7.0
Total	146	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

A significant majority of respondents, constituting 60.0%, support the notion that believers need not question the appropriateness or justification of tithing and seed sowings. Conversely, 33.0% of respondents disagree with this assertion, while 7.0% express indifference. This data suggests that for as much as 33% of respondents to be asking questions around church giving shows that the Christians are now inquisitive about what they give in the church.

3.4 Differing beliefs about the necessity and impact of these practices fuel the ongoing arguments

This section aims to explore the perception that arguments about tithing and seed sowing are coming up now in Nigeria and Gombe metropolis as a result of Nigeria's declining economic situation and overbearing attitudes perceived in some churches.

Table 4: Curiosity about tithing and seed sowing is partly attributed to dwindling economic situation and poverty

Label	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	102	70.0
Disagree	26	18.0
Indifferent	18	12.0
Total	146	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

Based on the data, a substantial 70.0% agree that certain Christians attribute the trending arguments about tithing and seed sowings to an increase in knowledge and socio-cultural awareness. In contrast, 18.0% disagree with this perspective, and 12.0% express indifference. The findings indicate a range of views within the surveyed population but it is clear from this data that the income of resident of Gombe Christians is an important determinant of what they give in the church. Their incomes are however determined by the economy of the city and Nigeria at large.

Table 5: Some Christians areskeptical towards paying offering and tithesbecause of the alleged greed of some churches and their leadership

Label	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	111	76.0
Disagree	27	18.0
Indifferent	8	6.0
Total	146	100

Source: Field Survey 2024

The data indicates a prevalent sentiment among respondents, with 76.0% agreeing that perceived overbearing attitude of the church contributes to indifference on the part of the members. Conversely, 18.5% disagree with this attribution,

and 5.0% express indifference. The data here shows that some Christians perceive that monies donated to the church are not being judiciously expended. The percentage here is high and this shows that it should be unsettling.

3.5 Discussions

The presented data from the fieldresult offers a comprehensive insight into the complex dynamics surrounding discussions on tithing and seed sowings across some church denominations. The varying perspectives captured in Tables 1 to 5 highlight the diversity of beliefs and opinions among the 146 respondents.

About Table 1enquiring on tithe and seed sowing as an obligation through this question:Every Christian is scripturally obliged to pay tithes and sow seeds reflects that this is a popular Christian practice in Gombe as much as it is popular among Christians in Nigeria. The table also reflects that majority of Christians possibly do pay their tithes and sow seeds in their individual churches. Another inference here (though not indicated in the data) is that some of the respondents may not be actively involved in paying tithes and sowing seeds, though they admit that the scripture has made it obligatory. This response portrays that donating into the church through the various methods such as have been mentioned is still popular despite emerging debates against its continuation. It further demonstrates that importance is attached to this practice beyond the ordinary, that makes Christians to continue in the practice despite the fact that there is no monitoring mechanism in effect to ensure compliance or punish disobedience. There are some of the churches where questionnaire was circulated that use tithes and offering cards while there are others that leave members to respond according to their conscience. This shows that Christians already have it in them to always do this voluntarily as a spiritual obligation.

Respondents' responses to Table 2 about the efficacy of tithing and seed sowing towards enhancing prosperity shows that the notion of giving in order to receive as stated in the scripture still subsists.Luke 6:38 which expresses that giving has to precede receiving could be seen to be enhancing the spirit of church giving greatly. The text further describes the quantity and weight of the reward; good measures, pressed down, shaken together and running over. Here, it is seen that when giving is done, the reward cannot be lesser than the input but may rather be more. This is seen as the spur for giving in many of the church gathering. There are even slogans in some churches such as "offering time, blessing time" and "givers never lack". This is chorused with enthusiasm whenever the offering bowl is about to be deployed. These motivative slogans in no small means motivate donors to always give with the hope that greater rewards await them. Some of them believe so much in the reward aspect of giving that they prefer to lay emphasis on giving than to increase their capacity to invest in their daily businesses in order to perpetuate it. This is however a negative perception towards church giving.Others invest in giving at the expense of advancing other Christian responsibilities. This response also shows that some Christians might want to possibly give to enhance their reward possibilities and not because they really want to genuinely give without expecting rewards. Some Christians however believe that the rewards from tithing and seed sowing could be gotten in heaven than on earth.The two tablesrevealed the perceived outcomes of engaging or not engaging in tithing and seed sowings.

The third statement which says that Christians need not question the appropriateness or otherwise of tithing and seed sowing is fielded

to assess the feelings of Christians as see if they are comfortable with giving in the church. Churches and church leaders are of the perspective that Christians ought not question or doubt church giving at all. They further claimed that a Christian that does that is under the influence of satanic delusion. However, questions are emanating from the inquisitiveness of those who query this practice of churches receiving tithes and offerings in the 21st century. They claimed that the New Testament has not established this means of giving as much as it is accentuated in the Old Testament. Their queries also center on the fact that the proceeds of these funds are not judiciously and transparently expended. In this work, we categorize them as "skeptics or questioners". They are both in the church and outside of it. Church leaders see them as trouble fomenters or agitators who are not welcomed in the church and any church that has them would want to do everything to expunge them.Their questions bother on the appropriateness of this fund, how unreasonable the church leaders are especially when they fail to be accountable for how the funds are disbursed, and the extravagance and opulence of these leaders which they claimed are at the expense of the members of their churches who bear the brunt. The churches under the attacks of these skeptics are mainly the Pentecostal and independent church denominations, especially the lone-founder churches. It is our opinion that as long as there is no transparency about church giving, questions will continue to arise as much as possible about how the funds are spent. It is also our position that giving in the church is a topic that is inexhaustible and unexplainable. It is to us a practice enshrouded in religiousness and devoutness; therefore, it cannot be completely materially ascertained.

Now to the fourth research statement:We perceive that those who are curiosity about tithing and seed sowing may be attributing it to dwindling economic situation and poverty. Here, giving generally in the ordinary sense is done when the thing to give is available and the condition is enabling. Therefore, parting with your resources is subject to calculation and favorable economic disposition. It is from this background that we perceive that doubterand some of the donors who are relapsing are basing their reasons for questioning church giving. The giving capacity of many Christians who give in the church appears to be dependent on the prevailing unfavorable economic situations that they have to contend with. When they cannot meet up with paying their bills, they cut some down and one of them is the donations they bring to the church.At the same time, those that are die-hard givers to the church have claimed that even economic downturn does not prevent them from giving. They claim to be deriving blessings and delights from carrying out such donations and this is why it seems mysterious to understand the strength and motivations of such givers. This is because, what is given out as gift has ceased to be yours forever but to now declare that what is given comes back in multiple in terms of God's blessing is what cannot be explained ordinarily. This is actually what we see as the unseen motivation and power supporting the perpetuity of church giving in Nigeria.

The questionnaire result about the fifth statement concerning the fact that some Christians are skeptical towards paying offering and tithes because of the alleged greed of some churches and their leadership,depicts that majority of the respondents widely agreed on this. This synchrony is not far-fetched as many perceived the church to be generally silent about certain alleged abuses in her. Some believe that the church in Nigeria is financially rich and that only few are benefitting from her wealth. Our

observation about this is that churches other than the mainline and mission oriented evangelical denominations in Nigeria are usually associated with financial misappropriation and recklessness. Some of them do not have well-structured administration, hence their lack of internal controls. These churches are mostly from the Pentecostal denominations where the leadership structure is centered around the founder figure whose decision is the final in the organizational structure. Since church members often take the words of these leaders as spiritual and infallible, they overlook most of their excesses, considering them as from God Himself. This situation possibly makes previous givers to become skeptical about giving in the church. It is of view that if openness and accountability are enhanced, the prospect of church giving could be brightened.

The summation here are in two perspectives. Firstly, when it pertains to matters involving expending of fund in an economically harsh condition like in Nigeria today, objectivity is usually a factor to reckon with. Church members today want to know why they are spending, what they are spending and the rationality behind such spendings. Giving in the church cannot be excluded in this regard. Secondly, giving out fund for tithes, offering or seed-faith in the church is more often than not attributed to faith, which cannot be empirically verified. This is why a concrete explanation as to its rationality may not be obtainable.

The data collectively reveals a rich tapestry of beliefs and opinions within the surveyed community. The discussions on tithing and seed sowings are influenced by factors such as scriptural interpretation, perceived benefits, consequences, rights of believers, and external socio-economic factors. The diversity in responses underscores the complexity of these discussions and highlights the importance of open dialogue within the church to foster understanding and unity. These findings can serve as a foundation for further exploration and discourse on the role of financial practices within the religious communities.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study's findings show that numerous Christians considered tithes and seed offering as obligatory. They do this without minding if any immediate benefit accrues. The inference of this is that donating in the church is spiritual with a high sense of devotion that cannot be quantified. This form of giving is selfless, though they expect a reward in heaven. This spirit and attitude of giving is encouraged in Nigeria whereby givers do so without expecting any immediate reward any sooner and definitely not from the person that benefited from the donation. Why skeptics are asking questions is because of uncertainties about the present economic realities and the fact that transparency and accountability are not demonstrated when disbursing church funds. This now warrants religious institutions in Nigeria, especially churches that they should be transparent in terms of accounting for fund intake and disbursement. This openness would help in no small means to curb doubts and also enhance institutional trust in church members and the society at large. The major motive of givers of tithe, seed faith, first fruit and others is to give for the love of God. This attitude could generate and perpetuate love in the society if every Nigerian could inculcate the act of giving for love of God and mankind. This will in no small means obliterate selfishness, inordinate display of sentiments and prejudices.

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