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Reimagining Tithing in the Selected New Prophetic Churches in South Africa: a Social Scientific Approach

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Abstract

The new prophetic churches in South Africa and elsewhere in the continent practice giving. There are many aspects to the concept of giving, such as tithing, seeding, offerings, and so forth. Members of the new prophetic churches are expected to give a tenth of their income as an obligation of their membership. In current practice, the clergy are the main beneficiaries of tithes in the selected new prophetic churches. This article reimagines the practice of tithing in these churches through social-scientific theory. The article argues that the proceeds of tithes should not only benefit the pastors but also the rest of the congregants, particularly those who are living in poverty and the marginalised. This is achieved by introducing the practice of tithing from a biblical and historical point of view. The article also outlines the practices of tithing in Pentecostalism and applies the same in new prophetic churches in South Africa. The aim of the article is to demonstrate that tithing has the potential to benefit society and deal with social ills such as poverty.

Keywords: Tithing; Tithes; Pentecostalism; New prophetic churches; Social scientific theory; Poverty; Enlightened Christian gathering; Rabboni Ministries International; Kingdom Prayer Ministry International

Introduction

Tithing is a common practice in the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, with few references to the practice in the New Testament (Van Rensburg 2002; cf Van der Merwe 2010). It is also a controversial practice, as some argue that tithing was only relevant in the Old Testament and no longer obligatory in a post-New Testament dispensation (Moyise 2011 cf Budiselić 2015, Tagwerei 2022). Tagwerei (2022:3) says that "There is confusion amongst many Christians and churches about the continuation, interpretation, and applicability of tithing from the Old to the New Testament as debates about the theology of New Testament tithing rage on unabatedly". However, regardless of these controversies, confusions, and debates, the practice of paying tithes is also embraced by new prophetic churches in Africa. These churches apply the concept of tithing radically by encouraging their members to pay a tenth of their income monthly. In current practice, the larger portion of the proceeds of the tithes are used for the benefit of the prophets rather than of the members of the new prophetic churches in South Africa and elsewhere in Africa. This article reimagines the practice of tithing in these churches by proposing social responsibility in the practice of tithing. The article will introduce the framework of social scientific theory as a way of departure. The concept of tithing will be studied in its historicity from a biblical and contemporary point of view. The concept of tithing will also be explored in the new prophetic churches with the aim of highlighting the abuses. The article will propose the idea of using the proceeds of tithes for the beneficiation of the poor people in new prophetic churches in South Africa.

The category "new prophetic churches" is used in this article to refer to churches that emphasise the prophetic titles, prophetic deliverance, prophetic consultations and prophetic healing products. However, the article does not aim to cover all of these churches in South Africa but to indicate that the concept of tithing is practiced within the selected new prophetic churches. The new prophetic churches such as Enlightened Christian Gathering of prophet Shepherd Bushiri, Rabboni Ministries International of Pastor Daniel Lesego and Kingdom Prayer Ministry International of Nana Poku will be used as case studies on the concept of tithing. This will be done in order to avoid generalisations on some of the malpractices of tithing in the Pentecostal movement. The main contribution of this article is to demonstrate that tithing can be used for the benefit of the majority of the members in the church rather than the current practices of mostly benefitting the prophets in new prophetic churches. In this way, tithing is used as part of the social transformation agenda within the framework of social scientific theory rather than self and instant gratification among prophets in new prophetic churches.

Social scientific theory

According to Colander (2016:8), a social-scientific theory is "a systematic explanation for the observations that relate to a particular aspect of social life". Social-scientific theory is an approach that is used to evaluate the social problems facing society within sociological studies (Laustsen, Larsen, Nielsen, Ravn and Sørensen 2017). Social-scientific theory aims to deal with the social patterns in the context of the social life of specific social groups (Gautam 2021). In this context, the social aspect of life refers to the concept of tithing and the social group refers to the selected new prophetic churches in South Africa. In addition, social-scientific theory explores the ways in which the same societal problems can be addressed using various approaches. In this article, social-scientific theory is used to evaluate how the practice of tithing is problematic to society, especially when it is used for the benefit of the prophets alone at the expanse of the majority who are suffering. At the same time, social-scientific theory is used to assess how tithing can be used for the benefit of the followers of the new prophetic churches in the South African context. This results in the concept of tithing not being confined to its financial aspects only but also analyses how it also affects the social aspects. This approach will assist us in a balanced view of the practice of tithing so that we do not only focus on the abuses but also on how the same concept can be used to address social ills in communities. Social-scientific theory in this article is used to assess the social responsibility of the church regarding the payment of tithes.

The biblical foundation of tithing

Tithing is a biblical principle that is meant for protection, upkeep, and covenant keeping within the Christian tradition (Premawardhana 2012; Adogame 2012; Gilman 2014). Premawardhana (2012:97) says that "tithing is best seen as the exchange of tangible

goods for the intangible necessities of divine acceptance, blessings, and protection". Tithing was practiced in the Old Testament as the payment of a tenth of the harvest received from land produce as well as animal production. The Israelites were expected to pay their tithe in respect to the covenant that God had established with them and in the continuation of God's protection of their lives (Adogame 2012:319). In this way, the payment of the tithe is not only defined as an allegiance to an organisation such as a church but as a covenant-keeping mechanism. According to Gilman (2014:101), "of the several kinds of tithes commanded in ancient Hebrew tradition, one of them was directed to assist the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28–29; 26:12–14). Every third year, the year of tithing, a tenth of one's possessions is required of Israelites as a contribution to the welfare of the poor, to Levites, to strangers, orphans, and widows." Therefore, the practice of tithing in its originality was not only meant for the clergy, which in the 21st century might be called the Levites, but for the poor and the marginalised: widows, orphans, strangers and so forth. After all, according to Numbers 18:26, the levites were also expected to pay their tithes: "Speak to the Levites and say to them: When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD's offering". Therefore, the idea that all the tithes should be received by the pastor is flawed. It might be clear in Numbers 18:21 and Nehemiah 10:37 that the Levites collect or receive the tithes, but the administration thereof is expected to benefit the marginalised as per Deuteronomy 14.
Those who pay their tithes have historically been promised different benefits, such as an increase in their blessing, protection, and open windows of heaven (Rakotsoane 2021). This is mainly taken from Malachi 3:8–10, which states:

> "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

From this biblical text, it is clear that the payment of tithes is expected to bring blessings to the believer, while non-payment is expected to bring a curse (Ademiluka 2020). Proverbs 3:9–10 also highlights the benefits of tithing or giving of firstfruits: "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." In addition, the children of Israel were expected to give their tithes of all, meaning everything that they receive for their crops, animals, and so forth. Idowu (2019:1) confirms that "Tithes include the tenth percent of farm produce or individual wages set apart as an offering to God or for works of benevolence, or a similar sum viewed as a commitment".

Tithing should also be understood in the context of the economic base on which the church is able to raise an income (Adogame 2012:319). This too follows the text in Malachi 3, as the rationale for tithing is that there might be food in the storehouse which in the 21st century can be interpreted as income for the church. Thus, even though the proceeds of tithes are not the only streams of church income, they are the main source of income for most churches in the Christian tradition. Mwenje (2016:76) explains that since churches are non-governmental organisations and non-profit organisations, tithes and other offerings become their main source of income. However, there have been debates as to whether the practice of tithing is relevant to the New Testament church. Some have used biblical texts such as 2 Corinthians 8:2–3, for example, to argue that the payment of tithes should be voluntary to the believer (Tagwerei 2022:4). The argument is that the payment of tithes should also be done as per the ability by the tithe payer because, as stated in 2 Corinthians 9:7, God loves a cheerful giver. Other debates that are common to the practice of tithing in the Christian tradition is the question as to whether congregants are supposed to tithe from their gross income or net. This article does not dwell much in these debates. The interest is rather on what churches do with the proceeds of tithes, particularly in new prophetic churches. However, before, one focuses on the new prophetic churches, it is important to contextualise the concept of tithing in the Pentecostal movement.

Contextualising tithing in the Pentecostal movement

In order identify the malpractices of tithing in the new prophetic churches, it is important to contextualise tithing in the broader Pentecostal movement of which these churches are part. Tithing in Pentecostalism is paying a tenth of the income that one receives monthly (Adogame 2012, Premawardhana 2012, Tagwerei 2022). Adogame (2012:319) states that in Pentecostalism, "tithes represent one-tenth of a members' total or gross income. While a tithe means 10% of all benefits that come a member's way, such as salary, inheritance, gifts, and even the interest earned on bank accounts". This is mainly taken from Leviticus 27:30, "A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. If a man redeems any of his tithes, he must add a fifth of the value to it. The entire tithe of the herd and flock – every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod – will be holy to the Lord". According to Tagwerei (2022:3), it is practiced as "the offering of one-tenth of acquired income, which may be in the form of money or material things." In some parts of the African continent, particularly in the West (where most believers are entrepreneurial), they pay their tithe on a weekly basis (Premawardhana 2012:92). According to Mwenje (2016:77), in some Pentecostal churches "the collection procedure of tithes is transparent; some use envelopes where someone writes their name on and the amount they are tithing or the members go directly to the church office and pay their tithes directly to the finance officer who then gives a receipt as proof of payment and records the name and the amount details in the tithing records." The classical Pentecostal church and Apostolic Faith Mission also use the same administrative process of receiving tithes. Masenya and Masenya (2018:634) add that "some of the pastors are so brazen as to install ATMs and speed point machines on their premises in a bid to encourage congregants to use them, as a convenient way to give offerings and tithes to the organisation." The latter has also exposed many Pentecostal churches in the South African context to thievery, as theieves also come to take their portion.

Tithing in Pentecostalism is practiced as an act of obedience to God. A non-tither is perceived as someone who is disobedient to God (Premawardhana 2012, Klaits and McLean 2015, Benyah 2018). The tither is perceived as someone who has been able to transition from ordinary membership of the church into a deeper relationship with God (Premawardhana 2012:100). It is for this reason that tithers are even allocated front seats in the church building to demonstrate that they are closer to God by paying their tithes. According to Benyah (2018:22), the believer who is able to pay the tithe is perceived as being in right standing with God as opposed to the non-tither. The practice of tithing is seen as the one that provokes the heavens in the obedience of God so that he can release the blessing to the believer. Hence, pastors in Pentecostal churches often condemn non-tithers as those who are disobeying God by not paying their tithes. When a non-tither is going through challenges, particularly financial challenges, they are blamed on the grounds that they have not paid their tithes (Klaits and McLean 2015:613). In other words, challenges such as misfortune, indebtedness, and so forth are perceived as curses that come to non-tithers. In addition, the pastors have a tendency to isolate the tithers and pray special prayers for them. However, they do not do the same to non-tithers, as they are perceived as disobedient to God. On the contrary, being a faithful tither does not necessarily translate to being in the standing with God, as some people are able to pay their tithes but live an ungodly life. Therefore, it is not proper to judge people based on their inability to pay their tithes in Pentecostalism. The believer's relationship with God can only be judged by God himself, not the pastor's biases based on the payment of tithes.

In Pentecostalism, the tithe is paid in the belief that the investment will be returned in a higher value (Premawardhana 2012, Uroko 2021, Tagwerei 2022). The Pentecostal believers who pay their tithe do not see it as a loss but as something that would give them higher returns in the future. The believers pay their tithes in the belief that their lives will be protected from harm and different atrocities. According to Tagwerei (2022:4), "Congregants are usually told that God will love, care and provide their needs if they give their tithes faithfully, adequately and consistently". Congregants in Pentecostal churches pay their tithes in the hope that they will be able to overcome various financial challenges (Uroko 2021). Therefore, the practice of paying tithes in congregations becomes popular because congregants hope to receive returns from their payment of tithes. In addition, they believe that once their tithe has been prayed for by the pastors, it will be able to produce more blessings. The popular text for returns is Luke 6:38 "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again".

Tithing among Pentecostals is used as a tool in the hands of the believer for material blessings (Premawardhana 2012; Frahm-Arp 2020; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Mendong 2023). Frahm-Arp (2020:161) points out that "Tithing and paying money to the prophet for specific prophecies is understood as a way to unlock God's material blessing on his people". The popular text is 3 John 1:2: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth". Pentecostals believe that the spiritual blessing must translate into a material blessing through the release of the tangible things they can see and touch. In this way, tithing is defined as a means to release the material blessing. Pentecostals perceive tithing and the giving of other offerings, such as sowing seeds, giving to building funds, and fundraising for missions as a means of accessing material blessings such as cars and houses. Therefore, whenever a Pentecostal believer is in need, they are encouraged to pay their tithes or any other offering to access their blessings. Although Comaroff and Comaroff (2012:62) point out that the principle of tithing has both material and spiritual blessings, the emphasis seems to be more on the material than the spiritual. Therefore, it is believed that when one tithes, they are the recipient of more blessings than those who do not pay their tithes. This motivates the believers to pay their tithes in the hope to receive an abundant blessing in their lives (Ojo 2012:307). In the end, according to Mendong (2023:709) "Materialism gospel preachers all made their followers to believe that in order for God to bless them with material wealth, they had to pay a tithe of their material possession in monetary form." This aspect of tithing is discussed in detail in the next section by zooming in on the practice of tithing in the selected new prophetic churches in South Africa.

The practice of tithing in the selected new prophetic churches

New prophetic churches are discussed in the context of the Pentecostal movement but different from other classical Pentecostal churches. As highlighted in the introduction, these churches emphasise prophetic titles, prophetic consultations, prophetic deliverance and prophetic products. These churches are selected because in most of them the prophet is the major beneficiary of tithing, as opposed to the marginalised as highlighted in Deuteronomy 14. The first church to be discussed here is the Enlightened Christian Gathering of Prophet Shepherd Bushiri that used to operate here in South Africa in the Tshwane Events Centre (formerly Pretoria Showgrounds), but Bushiri has since relocated and is now back home in Malawi. Nevertheless, the Enlightened Christian Gathering is a relevant church for this article. According to Frahm-Arp (2020:160), prophets such as Shepherd Bushiri have a propensity to ask their members to pay tithes directly into their own personal accounts to access the material blessings. In this way, the tithes of the congregants are used to benefit the prophets and their families rather than benefit the marginalised, as commanded in Deuteronomy 14. The payment of tithes to prophets like shepherd Bushiri is done to sponsor their lavish lifestyles rather than to benefit the marginalised. In addition, Frahm-Arp (2020:160) recalls a moment in 2020 during COVID-19 when Bushiri asked his congregants to pay their tithes even when they were not going to church. Kgatle (2020:4) explains that:

> Bushiri appeared on a video during the early stages of the lockdown requesting his congregants to contribute their tithes and offerings through EFTs. In another video, Bushiri promised tithe payers a prayer that will guarantee their financial well-being, health and prosperous life. The public perceived the request as being insensitive to people's loss of income and other difficulties that households faced during the lockdown.

While it is not wrong to ask people to pay their tithe, the challenge is that at this time, when many people had lost their jobs and were in difficult situations, it demonstrated a form of oppression of the marginalised. Therefore, the principle of tithing is problematic when it benefits the prophets such as Bushiri at the expense of the poor people. It reproduces abuses when the majority poor people are used for the enrichment of the few elite prophets in these churches. Shingange (2020:121) states that "the tendencies of using prophetic utterances to lure followers into giving tithes which are then used to buy spiritual leaders expensive cars, clothes and other symbols of material wealth should be challenged at all cost".

The second church under discussion is the Rabboni Ministries International under pastor Daniel Lesego in Soshanguve north of Pretoria. Frahm-Arp (2020:155) says that "Lesego Daniels, a South African, started Rabboni in 2002 in Ga-Rankuwa, a peri-urban area outside Pretoria. It only attracts black people and has a primarily South African congregation drawn from the working class and the unemployed". Frahm-Arp (2020:161) also mentioned Rabboni Ministries International as one of the churches that encouraged the congregants to pay their tithes during COVID-19, when the majority of South Africa where in a financial challenging situation. This was done without taking into account the fact that the majority of the members would not be able to pay their tithes. But pastor Daniel Lesego created online sessions where at the end of each session members were encouraged to pay their tithes. Frahm-Arp (2020:161) explains that "Towards the end of their church services, Rabboni Ministries International impressed upon people the need to continue to tithe because it was part of the Christian call and an important way in which to access God's blessings". In saying this, pastor daniel Lesego was reaffirming the principle of tithing and its continuity even during the challenging circumstances of COVID-19. Therefore, while tithing on its own is a biblical principle, its continued emphasis in the middle of a pandemic is problematic.

The last church to be discussed in this context is Kingdom Prayer Ministry International under a Ghanain, Nana Poku, who used to operate in South Africa. According to Frahm-Arp (2020:155) "the Ghanaian Nana Poku's KPMI church was established in 2013 in Rustenburg, a relatively small town that has suffered an economic downturn as the mining industry in South Africa has been significantly reduced over the last ten years. Poku's church attracts a diverse following of largely working-class black people from countries all over Africa". Poku, like Bushiri and Lesego, would solicit tithes before praying for his congregants who are in need of prayers. Poku, other than the issue of tithing, has a tendency to ask members to randomly give him money before he can pray for them. Poku would manipulate members of his church that if they do not pay their tithes, the church would not be able to continue to operate, as the church's operation requires money. Therefore, tithing in the selected churches demonstrates that believers are requested to give even when they do not have. In addition, giving of tithes benefits the prophets more than the members. Members pay their tithes to sponsor the lavish lifestyles of the prophets. All these aspects of tithing in new prophetic churches are discussed in detail in the next section.

Problematising tithing in new prophetic churches in South Africa

The concept of tithing is problematic when the believer pays their tithes, but the prophet such as Shepherd Bushiri is the only one receiving the blessing (Ojo 2013, Tagwerei 2022). In other words, the payment of tithes in new prophetic churches does not directly benefit the marginalised believer but the prophet. According to Tagwerei (2022:4), those who believe in this school of thought have used Deuteronomy 14:22–29, "which is understood traditionally in Pentecostal churches to be a call for members of the church to bring their tithes for pastors' sustenance." Moreover, Genesis 14:20 and Hebrews 7:9–10 are also used in the support that tithe must specifically be paid to the Levites. In this case, the contemporary prophet is seen as the Levite who receives the tithes and pays the tithe of tithes (a tenth of the tithing revenue) to the high priest. The modern-day high priest is a prophet with different church branches that are expected to pay tithe of tithes to them. This explains why so many senior pastors with many branches are rich and live lavishly: the principle of the tithe of tithes. The latter is very common among the new prophetic churches and not so common among classical Pentecostal churches. It must be noted that the other scriptures, such as Malachi 3 and Acts 2, support the sharing of the proceeds of tithes with the needy. However, the payment of tithes directly to the prophet as opposed to paying it to the church should not occur, as the tithe revenue is too easily hijacked for the benefit of the prophet (Ojo 2013).

When the believers are not treated equally based on their tithing ability, this creates a form of abuse of the system in new prophetic churches (Ukah 2007, Amanze 2008, Mwenje 2016). When a believer gives more tithing revenue, they also receive preferences in terms of prayer and other benefits. However, the believers who are not able to pay their tithes are often not eligible for the special prayer of blessings by the pastor. Some members of the church are not eligible for other membership benefits, such as funerals for their loved ones and so forth, on the basis that they have not paid their tithes. Ukah (2007:636) points out that some members who are due for ordinations do not receive them based on their inability to pay their tithes. They are judged for not paying their tithes and perceived as believers who are cursed and whose windows of heaven are closed (Amanze 2008:7). This is an unfair treatment to the congregants, as some would love to tithe but have various reasons for failing to pay their tithes. Some congregants whose spouses are not going to new prophetic churches do not want to pay tithes to the church (Mwenje 2016:76). Therefore, it is unfair to judge any non-tither, as some of them have valid reasons for not paying their tithes. Other congregants might not pay their tithes because they cannot afford them at that point given their financial circumstances, such as debts and other responsibilities. It is therefore pivotal to evaluate each non-tither’s position before judging them and refusing to pray for their blessings.

When tithing is paid beyond the person’s means, it presents a form of abuse (Frahm-Arp 2018, 2020 and Ojo 2013). The demand for believers to pay their tithe even when facing challenges such as Covid-19 is highly problematic (Frahm-Arp 2020:161). This means that prophets in new prophetic churches demand tithes even when their followers are not able to pay them due to their dire situations. In concepts such as sacrificial tithing, where believers are expected to give sacrificially, this might hurt those who are at the bottom of the economy. In addition, according to Ojo (2013), some congregants end up stealing from their workplaces in order to impress their prophets who demand the payment of tithes. Thus, the demand for tithes from those who are not able to pay leads to abuses, which even include theft. Hence, Frahm-Arp (2018:14) states that although the concept of tithing is good, it should not be practiced as an imposition to the congregants, particularly those who are not able to pay their tithes. There is therefore a need for a careful consideration for the payment of tithes and offerings in new prophetic churches in South Africa. In the next section, a social-scientific approach is proposed in this article for the practice of tithing that considers the poor and the marginalised.

Reimagining tithing in the new prophetic churches

In becoming more socially responsible, tithing can be used in new prophetic churches as a tool for social empowerment. The principle of tithing should not be used to propagate inequalities within new prophetic churches. Rather, it should be a practice that brings equality between the prophet of a congregation and the congregants thereof. The solicitation of the tithes within these churches should not be done for the benefit of the prophets only but also for marginalised congregants. In other words, tithing should become an antithesis of the capitalist approaches to the economics of new prophetic churches in South Africa. It is a capitalist approach to only pray and bless the congregants based on their ability to pay their tithes. By the capitalist approach in this article, one refers to the system that maximises the profits in important means of production (Screpanti 1999). In the new prophetic churches' context, it refers to using the system of tithing as a means to maximise profits in the church to benefit prophets. This means that the poor in new prophetic churches will never be blessed because they are not able to bring more tithes into the churches. In the social scientific approach, the prophet should be able to bless everyone in church regardless of whether they tithe or not. By not blessing the poor, the prophets would be propagating the capitalist approach in the new prophetic church in South Africa.

Tithing can be used as a tool for poverty alleviation in new prophetic churches in South Africa. The principle of tithing in the social scientific approach is not a money-making scheme but an income generation that benefits all believers. The proceeds of tithes should not only become the means of enriching the prophets but a means of dealing with socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment, particularly among the youth. When reimagining the practices of tithing through a social-scientific approach, it means that tithing becomes the principle that alleviates social ills in communities. After all, the gospel of Jesus Christ is to announce liberty to the poor rather than the enrichment of pastors and televangelists (Luke 4:18). Therefore, the proposal here is that the practice of tithing should be done for the benefit of the very poor in new prophetic churches instead of enriching the churches' leaders.

Within a social-scientific theory framework, tithing can be used for ministering to the various needs of the congregants in the 21st century. In the South African context, where many people are living in poverty, the church can be an answer by providing for the needy in their congregations. Tithing has the potential as a system to provide for the needs of the congregants in a similar way that taxes have been used for the citizens in the government system (Kauppinen 2020). By "government system", one refers to the way in which the government runs its affairs at local, provincial, and national levels through its three arms, which are the legislative, executive, and judiciary (Republic of South Africa 1996). We cannot imagine a situation where only government officials and the president benefit from the proceeds of taxes. Similarly, the payment of tithes cannot only benefit the person of the pastor but must benefit all the congregants, particularly the poor and the needy. Shingange (2020:121) states the payment of tithes in new prophetic churches is an important practice; however, it should "be properly collected and administered in order to support the work of God such as helping the poor and supporting community-based development projects."

The social aspects of tithing are possible when the believers pay the tithe to the church account instead the personal account of the pastor, as this has the potential to result in the system being abused. Therefore, the new prophetic churches in South Africa should make a distinction between the personal account of the pastor and the church account. In the Malachi 3 version of tithing, the tithe should be brought to the storehouse. In the 21st century, this means the church is not essential to the person of the prophet. When tithe is only paid to the prophet, it only benefits the pastor and his or her family, while the majority of the congregants would continue to suffer while they pay their tithes. Furthermore, the tithe should be a voluntary action by the congregants instead of becoming an obligation for all the members of the church. When tithe is obligatory in the new prophetic churches, it disadvantages the poor congregants, who are sometimes forced to pay up to their last cent to honour the obligation. Some congregants in these churches pay their tithes because of the fear of curses or even the fear of disobeying God. Hence, a proposal here is for a voluntary tithing rather than an obligatory one that forces the poor to give their last penny.

Conclusion

This article conceptualised tithing from historical and contemporary practices in the new prophetic churches. The article acknowledged the value of tithing since its inception in ancient times and in the new prophetic churches using case studies in Enlightened Christian Gathering, Rabboni Ministries International and the Kingdom Prayer Ministry International. Tithing is a source of income for these churches that is also used in the payment of salaries, particularly for prophets. But some of these prophets use the proceeds of tithes to sponsor their own lavish lifestyles. The article proposed that the proceeds of tithes should be allocated not only for the prophets but also for poverty alleviation projects. The article used social-scientific theory to demonstrate that tithing is relevant for dealing with social ills such as poverty. This changes how we study the concept of tithing in the new prophetic churches. It means that tithing can no longer be studied by only considering its abuses or exploitation, but we should also look at the value that tithing gives in these churches. Instead of being used for the exploitation of the congregants, tithes can be used for their empowerment. This is an important contribution to the discourses on tithing within the Christian faith, especially Pentecostalism.

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