

DOES RELIGIOUS GIVING MATTER? AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTS OF GIVING IN CHURCH ON THE BELIEVER'S FAITH IN SELECTED URBAN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES IN NAKURU TOWN, NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

DOREEN NYAMOSI¹ & JOYCE W. NDERITU²

¹MA Religious Studies, Mount Kenya University, Kenya

²Lecturer in Bible and Theology Department Pan African Christian University & Dr Simon Nderitu,
Lecturer, Mount Kenya University, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to assess the effects of giving in church on the Christians' economic status in selected urban Pentecostal churches in Nakuru town, Nakuru County. The objectives of the study were; to determine whether giving in church is mandatory in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru Town, to establish if Christians should give according to their capacities in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru Town, to assess the amount of money given per month by Christians in Pentecostal Churches in Nakuru Town. The researcher focused on Ninian Smart's dimensions of religion while putting emphasis on the practical and ritual dimension, the experiential and emotional dimension, the ethical and legal dimension. The practical and ritual dimension focused on what members of a religion did as part of that religion. The target population included church members and leaders of Pentecostal churches in Nakuru town. The study used simple random sampling and a total number of 311 respondents were sampled. The questionnaire was used as the only instruments of the study. The study found out that Christians should give according to one's capacity as opposed to the stated amount given by some churches. The study asserted that the urban Pentecostal churches lay more emphasis on giving than on spiritual nourishment. The study recommended the following: Young couples should be advised properly on issues regarding the issue of marriage, this is because the divorce rate among the church members was high. Churches should come up with ways of encouraging giving in church other than search for blessings. There is need for churches to nurture the spiritual life of Christians as majority of the respondents felt that they had focused on material possession A study should be carried out on the effect of church financial auditing and on Christian giving.

KEYWORDS: Religious Giving, Prosperity Gospel, Offering, Tithes, Offerings, Blessings

1. INTRODUCTION

Giving entails monetary or material gifts Christians offer in church. There are many ways in which Christians' wish to show appreciation to God but above all, they opt to do it by giving. In the Old Testament, people used to offer mostly through animal sacrifices and plant produce but in the New Testament, giving is basically in form of money and sometimes other materials. Christians are also supposed to give tithes which is a tenth of the monthly incomes whether money or produce. However, things are slowly changing in society as giving is being done more through cash and preachers are emphasizing that Christians ought to give more in order to get more blessings and less challenges in life. This has led to many churches especially Pentecostal churches coming up whose motive is sometimes questionable (Oduke 2013).

Pentecostalism emerged in the early 20th century among radical adherents of the Holiness Movement which was energized by revivalism and expectation for the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Believing that they were living in the end times, they expected God to spiritually renew the Christian church thereby bringing to pass the restoration of the world. The key beliefs of Pentecostalism include; Divine healing, Spiritual gifts, Visions, Speaking in tongues, Prophecy, Latter rain, Baptism with the Holy Spirit and Finished work (Macchia 2006).

In Kenya, many Pentecostal churches have mushroomed especially in urban areas. Their emphasis is that giving, especially tithing is a sure way of getting one's socio-spiritual breakthrough. This breakthrough could be in form of healing, finance, marital success, promotion in the workplace and other favours from God. Biblical verses, such as Malachi 2, are elaborately expounded to build the case for life breakthroughs. They believe that the Calvary package not only included salvation but also included the prosperity and inheritance of our hands and feet. They believe that Christians are supposed to be partakers of Calvary blessings every day of their lives because they are the children of God. Such money centered messages have propelled majority of the urban Christians who are always in such of money to join churches that preach prosperity gospel. It was on this background that the study found it relevant to take an assessment of the effects of giving in church on the believer's faith: a case of selected urban Pentecostal churches in Nakuru town, Nakuru county, Kenya

1.1 The Concept of Church Offerings

Rushdoony (2006) refers the tithe a tax. It is the divinely commanded way for Christians to bless the world and take control of it. While many may view tithing as legalistic, Rushdoony (2006) sees it as the outworking of the requirement of loving God. He likens the lack of tithing to a husband saying that he loves his family but not supporting them. Rushdoony (2006) utilizes Malachi 3 for evidence and says that a failure to pay tithes results in the curse given in Malachi 3:10. When people neglect tithing, God will fulfill what he said in Malachi which is similar to the results of the fall in Genesis 3: "Failure to tithe aggravates and develops the curse. Therefore, tithing is extremely important, so much so that governments are required to punish those who do not tithe (as was the case in early America). However, obedience to this law will result in national and personal prosperity.

Rushdoony (2006) says that the tithe, God's tax, was given to the Levites, that is, "to all whose work is to further God's requirement of instruction (Deut. 33: 10) and the ministry of compassion to Christians begin to tithe obediently, then Christianity will be able to start and support churches, schools, hospitals, missions organizations, a ministry of justice, and relief agencies for the poor. Since people have sovereignty over their own tithes, they can decide which institutions are truly serving God and, therefore support *God's* work. In fact, Powell and Rushdoony (2006) say, "It is a silly and self-serving modernism which leads some clergymen to insist that the *storehouse* is the church.

It was a tithe-barn." Rushdoony (2006) discussed the three Mosaic tithes. He said that sometimes the Levitical Tithe would be less than ten percent: if a man had sixteen sheep, the tenth one (as he counted them) would go toward the tithe; he did not tithe part of a sheep. Powell and Rushdoony (2003) conclude that this tithe belongs to God and therefore not to the church or to the giver. It can be given only to godly causes. The Festival Tithe (or the second tithe) was kept by the person tithing to be used at the three annual festivals: the Passover.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Biblical giving, here also called religious giving is voluntary and as one is able to give, for God loves a cheerful

giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-8). This is the oughtness regarding biblical giving. However, fake miracles and prosperity gospel is flourishing in Kenya, with many forms of unbiblical giving. According to Kibaara (2013), when the shepherds go astray, the flocks are bound to suffer (Daily Nation, Nov. 2013). Kibaara (2013) further pointed out that "Spiritually abusive groups routinely use guilt, fear and intimidation to control their members. They might base their sermons on a biblical verse, which they support by interpreting it in a manner that resonates with the congregation." The grinding poverty has made many desperate and depressed especially the working poor. Thus prosperity gospel came with promises of peace, riches and freedom from poverty. The more prosperity preaching, the more poverty, the more crime, the more giving because the rich preachers get richer and the poor givers get poorer for giving more but receiving less, hence more poverty. The research was aimed at getting to know the speculation of some people who feel that these churches have gone ahead to be commercial whereby presentation of the Biblical message was either as a commodity for sale for material gain or as an object of investment for personal aggrandizement. This study sought to address this gap in religious practice.

1.3 Key Questions which Guided the Study Were

- Is giving in church mandatory in Pentecostal Churches in Nakuru Town?
- How much do Christians give in church per month in Pentecostal Churches in Nakuru Town?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researcher focused on Ninian Smart's dimensions of religion while putting emphasis on the practical and ritual dimension, the experiential and emotional dimension, the ethical and legal dimension. God has prescribed laws on giving as the only legitimate and righteous judge. The practical and ritual dimension focused on what members of a religion did as part of that religion. Most religions have a specific way in which the dress, pray, the way they handle matters of discipline among other regulations. The experiential and emotional dimension looks at what experience goes on inside a person when facing religious activities. When a person participates in religious experience, they feel some form of holiness. When one feels some sort of emptiness from inside he or she tends to move closer to a sacred supreme being with the hope of getting a wish fulfilled. Christians were also likened to those who are in need of some help.

The above discussed dimension closely linked to Glock's consequential dimension whereby there is a belief of getting positive consequences from a religious experience. Christians have put all their faith and trust in church leaders as they consider them to be the mediators between them and their God. They follow what these leaders say and sometimes they seek advice from them when they felt challenged. But this has taken a different dimension as religious leaders have started to exploit these innocent Christians in the name of religion. Christians know that God will solve their problems and therefore they do whatever religious leaders say, and what these leaders say is that they need to give generously in order to receive. They even go ahead to quote strong verses from the Bible which Christians strongly believe in.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Willard (2013) observes that "The Sunday worship services are key opportunities to share generosity stories, teach giving, build trust, cast vision and build relationships with people. Asking people to become generous and give to ministry is a ministry in itself. However, it was necessary for this research to look at the second objective which seeks to establish if Christians should give according to their capabilities. Willard's idea is similar to Durkheim's definition of religion where he said, "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, things set aside and

forbidden.” He focused on the importance of the concept of the sacred and its relevance to the welfare of the entire community. Religious beliefs are thus symbolic expressions of social realities, without those realities serving as foundation, religious beliefs would have no meaning. Many have disputed this reductionist attitude, arguing that religion is more than expressing these social realities. People of a particular religion have a way of praying, mode of dressing, asceticism, possession which is more in Pentecostal churches among other practical aspects (Hanegraaff, 2009). Further Smart’s experiential and emotional dimension which regards the subjective, emotional side of religion and what goes on inside the person is very important in religion as most religions act on what one feels and believes. The ethical and legal dimension is also relevant as it focuses on what is good and bad in religion and the laws which are to be observed by adherents of a particular religion. In general Smart’s ideologies fit what religion regards and therefore his thoughts will be a pillar in this research. (Smart 2000)

According to Kibaara (2013), when the shepherds go astray, the flocks are bound to suffer (Daily Nation, Nov. 2013). Kibaara (2013) further pointed out that “Spiritually abusive groups routinely use guilt, fear and intimidation to control their members. They might base their sermons on a biblical verse, which they support by interpreting it in a manner that resonates with the congregation (Page 12).” The grinding poverty has made many desperate and depressed especially the working poor. Thus prosperity gospel came with promises of peace, riches and freedom from poverty. The more prosperity preaching, the more poverty, the more crime, the more giving because the rich preachers get richer and the poor givers get poorer for giving more but receiving less, hence more poverty (Oduke, 2013). The research was aimed at getting to know the speculation of some people who feel that these churches have gone ahead to be commercial whereby presentation of the Biblical message was either as a commodity for sale for material gain or as an object of investment for personal aggrandizement. More emphasis is put on giving more in order to get deliverance.

Suffice it to say that severe criticisms have come from many individuals and groups within Pentecostalism. Numerous sources could be listed in this regard. For instance, Horn (1989), writing as a Pentecostal himself, describes the historical development of the Faith Movement and its relation to the Pentecostal Movement in his *From rags to riches*. Interestingly enough, some of the main reasons for the breach between classical Pentecostals and the Healing evangelists (including those who later became prominent in the Faith movement) revolved around the claims of the evangelists regarding financial prosperity, claims which were coupled with their extraordinary fundraising methods (Horn 1989).

Horn (1989) further convincingly shows how the Healing evangelists laid the foundation for the later faith message and how this message relates to questions of medical help, doubt and those who do not receive healing, to teachings on the new birth, realized eschatology and the doctrine of prosperity itself. He thus assesses the developments in the broader Pentecostal movement from an anticapitalistic and anti-prosperity theology to the theology of the Faith movement. Miller and Yamamori (2007) fully acknowledge that the expression of Pentecostalism described as the exploitation of poor and desperately ill people.

Miller & Yamamori (2007) in their study offer examples of individuals and groups who have benefited in more than one way from their commitments to Christ and to financial stability, and how have experienced upward mobility. The above authors use the term “progressive Pentecostals” in this regard for people and churches that have active social ministries and who take money matters very seriously. Their investigation found out that there were people who were undoubtedly healed in Prosperity Gospel churches and had consistent testimonies of others who were blessed financially as a result of their faithful tithing.

The Apostle Paul describe giving in church in different ways; he calls is *logia* in 1st Corinthians 16.1 meaning a collection a man was required to pay to cover expenses for a need that may arise from time to time among believers. According to Martin (1990) Paul calls the church giving as *Charis* (1st Corinthians, 8:4) a gift freely given from the overflow of love from a person's heart. Paul calls describes *diakonia* (2nd Corinthians 8:4) as the money that acts as service to places where Christian service is needed but one is limited to go because of life demands. Eulogia means bounty and is the money given grudgingly as an unavoidable duty. *Leitourgia* was the generous and voluntary giving of the citizens of Athens from their own pocket. Paul in Acts 25:17 terms giving in church as *Prospora* that is an offering and a sacrifice offered to brothers in need in the name of Jesus (Martin, 1990). Giving in church is thus evident in the bible and it was practiced by both Jewish in the Old Testament and early Christian believers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive survey design in a descriptive correlation design because the researcher was looking for a relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. The descriptive Correlation method helps the researcher to determine if two or more variables are associated with one another but not necessarily implying that this relationship is also a cause (Fraenkel, 1993). The researcher used the descriptive correlation was used to look for the relationship between giving in church and believers' faith.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Giving in Church should be MANDATORY

As indicated in figure 4.1 below, majority of the respondents (48.89%) strongly agreed while 26.67% also agreed that giving is mandatory in church. Five percent of the respondents were not sure while 6.88% disagreed and 12.56% strongly disagreed that giving is mandatory in church. The fact that majority of the respondents agreed that giving is mandatory is a factor that has contribute to the current mushrooming of the Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

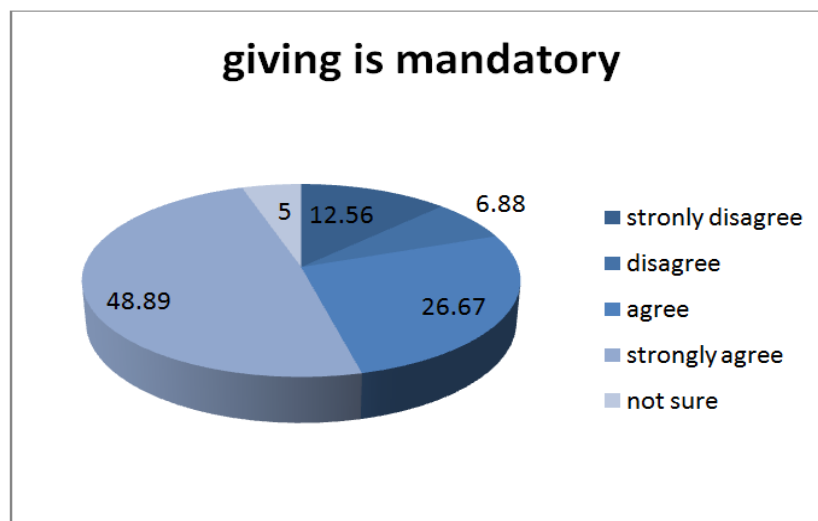


Figure 4.1: Showing Giving to be Made Mandatory in Church

4.2 Giving in Monetary Terms

As shown in figure 4.2 above majority of respondents strongly disagreed to a large extent (60%) that giving should not be in monetary form, 20% of the respondents also agreed that money is not the only form of giving in church.

The findings also concurs with Old Testament acts where the Israelites gave whatever each owned, for those who had jewels they gave and to those who had farm produce and animals they also gave all acceptable before the eyes of God (Wigere, 2005).

However, 13.33% strongly agreed that giving should be strictly based on monetary terms, 6.66% of the respondents were of the same opinion. They suggested that in the modern urban churches it was effective to use money as it is easily portable and less cumbersome as compared to farm products or animals. Church leaders also cited that it would be inconvenient for churches to accept giving's like farm produce and animals as most of the churches did not have adequate store for this products. Some churches were makeup shelters using tents which were brought gown after the church service.

Giving in Monetary Terms

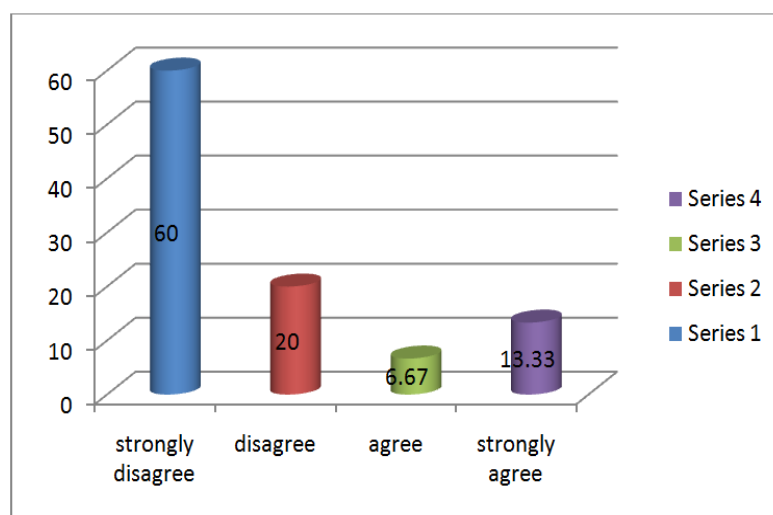


Figure 4.2: Showing whether should Giving be in Monetary Terms

4.3 Giving in Church to Get Blessings

In relation to giving in church to get blessings majority of the respondents (42.22%) strongly agreed that they will give in order to get blessings from God, also 15.56% agreed on the same note. However, 33.33% strongly disagreed while 15.56% disagreed on the notion of giving to get blessing. This finding concurred with Jones and Woodbridge (2011) who cited that purposive giving in search was wrong because God is not pleased by the money we give but with the actions we do to believer and non-believers

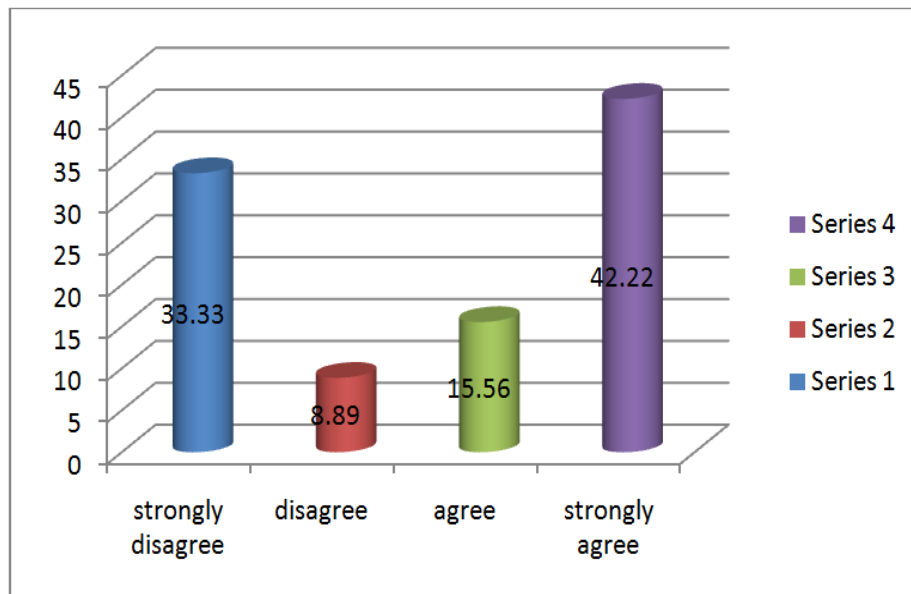


Figure 4.3: Showing Whether Participants Give to Get Blessings

4.4 Modern Churches Emphasize More on Giving Than Spiritual Nourishment

As shown in figure 4.4 below, it is not surprising that majority of the respondents (62.22%) strongly agreed and 17.78% agreed that modern churches emphasize more on giving than spiritual nourishment. This finding concurs with Brown (2011) who asserts that the traditional bible study in the church has died and Christians spend an average of 2 hours on a Sunday to hear the word of God. However, 13.33% of the respondents disagreed while 6.67% of the respondents strongly disagreed too. They cited that the church teachings had been modified to meet the contemporary needs of most of the Christians. This argument is further supported by telecast Joyce Meyer who in a podcast message condemns Christians living in poverty because it is a sign of having less faith in God (Brown, 2011). The essence of a Christian lifestyle is the spiritual connection with God and Christ; however, some Pentecostal churches seem to contradict this belief.

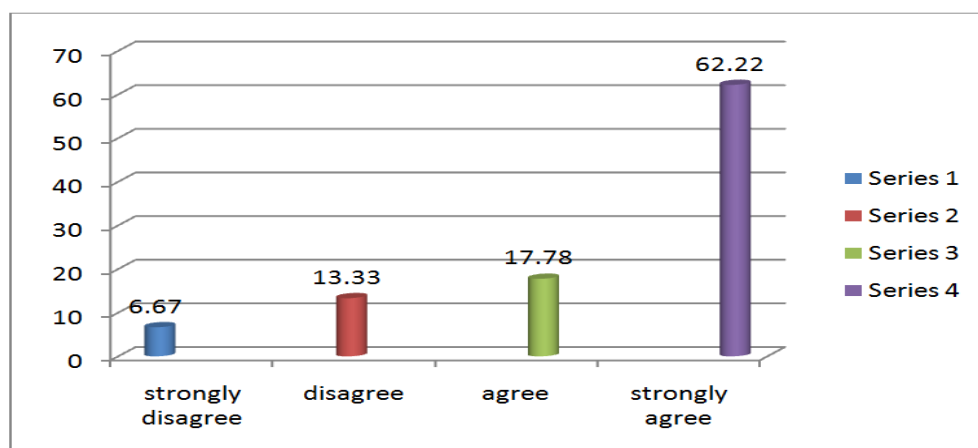


Figure 4.4: Showing Church Emphasize More on giving than Spiritual Nourishment

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the respondents (48.89%) strongly agreed while 26.67% also agreed that giving is mandatory in church. Five percent of the respondents were not sure while 6.88% disagreed and 12.56% strongly disagreed that giving is mandatory in church. The fact that also majority of the respondents agreed that they gave in church to get blessing enhances mandatory giving in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru town. However the study found from the church financial records that majority of the Christians were poor givers.

Majority of the respondents (77.27%) agreed that Christians should give according to one's capacity, 11.36% also agreed on the same issue. This finding was supported by the respondents who agreed strongly that giving should not be restricted to monetary value. Although the pastor's sermon influenced 11.91% of the respondents to give the larger group 59.32% were motivated to give because of biblical reasons. This called for intense bible reading which the majority of Christians do not do.

Most churches (65.86%) received 10,000-50,000 other churches received 1,000-10,000 (16.8%), less than 1,000 (10%) and above 50,000 (7.34%). This is an indicator that Christians were giving money in urban Pentecostal churches to sustain the church and its activities. The study noted with a lot of concern that majority of the church members did not give as required comparing the amount of money and the salary scale of the church members. The fact that majority of the respondents (62.22%) cited that churches emphasized more on giving than spiritual nourishment seem to contribute to poor giving's in church.

Conclusively, the study found that giving on the basis of searching for blessings is a major factor among the Pentecostal churches. Conclusively, the respondents asserted that preachers were not allowed to ask for offerings in church but rather allow Christian intrinsic motivation propel Christians to give in church.

5.1 Recommendations

The study came up with the following recommendations

- Young couples should be advised properly on issues regarding the issue of marriage, this is because the divorce rate among the church members was high.
- Christians should be allowed to give that which they see valuable in the eyes of God as opposed to the monetary restricts
- Christians should be more educated on issues regarding giving as majority believed that sole purpose of giving is for blessings
- There is need for churches to nurture the spiritual life of Christians as majority of the respondents felt that they had focused on material possession

5.2 Significance of Findings

The study findings may benefit all members of the society especially preachers, church members and non-members in order to stop any victimization against preachers and restore confidence among members. The findings of this study enlightened the society on the significance of giving in church as a Christian practice as opposed to the preachers'

demands. The Christians should be made aware that giving depends on one's capacities and willingness and not from pressure of preachers. The leaders of these churches became aware that their believers may lose trust in them if they show any form of materialism

5.3 Areas for Further Research

The researcher proposes that further research should be done in the following areas:

- A similar study should be carried out on causes of divorce among young Christian couples
- Scholars may study the impact of televangelism on spiritual growth of Christians.
- A study should be carried out on the effect of church financial auditing and on Christian giving

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