

TITHING AND THE ECONOMY OF CHRISTIAN GIVING: A PATRISTIC AND PASTORAL SYNTHESIS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

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Abstract

This research examines the theological transformation of tithing within the Christian tradition through a combined analysis of Scripture, the Church Fathers, doctrinal development, and contemporary ecclesial practice. The study argues that tithing, originally a legal obligation under the Mosaic covenant, underwent a profound reinterpretation in the early Church. For some Fathers, such as St. Irenaeus, tithing belonged to the abrogated ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ; others, including St. Cyprian, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine, saw continuity in the principle of supporting the clergy and the poor, though transformed by the demands of charity in the new dispensation. The research further explores how the Fathers expand the notion of Christian giving beyond fixed percentages toward sacrificial generosity, voluntary offerings, and even “tithes of life,” as found in John Cassian's spiritual exegesis. By integrating biblical theology, patristic testimony, systematic reflection on law and grace, and pastoral implications for the modern Church, this study proposes a contemporary framework, Sacrificial Generous Giving, as a theological continuation, not legal replication, of ancient tithing. This approach honours Scripture, tradition, and the lived reality of the Church while remaining faithful to the spirit of Christ's teaching on charity.

Keywords: Tithing, Church Fathers, Christian Giving, Patristic Theology, Sacrificial Generosity.

1. Introduction

The question of tithing has long stood at the intersection of biblical command, ecclesial tradition, and Christian moral life. In contemporary Christianity (particularly in pastoral contexts where the faithful wrestle with financial obligations, misunderstandings, and spiritual motivations) the subject returns frequently, often carrying both theological confusion and pastoral urgency. A balanced and scholarly reflection on the matter is therefore essential.

The Hebrew practice of *maaser* (tithing) emerged as both a religious and socio-economic structure in ancient Israel, pre-dating Mosaic legislation and later regulated within the ceremonial law. Biblical texts note that Abram “gave Melchizedek one-tenth of all he looted after his victory in battle” (Gen. 14:20) and that Jacob likewise vowed a tenth to God (Gen. 28:22), demonstrating tithing's antiquity.

Mosaic law then codified the practice for the support of Levites, temple worship, and social care. Yet, with the coming of Christ, the early Church faced a crucial theological question: Does tithing remain a Christian obligation?

The Fathers of the Church, whose voices form the backbone of this study, do not speak with a single tone- some reject obligatory tithing as part of the Old Covenant; others

reinterpret it spiritually; still others adapt its principles pastorally for the New Covenant community. It is because they form the roots of Christian doctrinal development, their testimonies provide a uniquely authoritative lens for examining the theological continuity and discontinuity between Israel and the Church.

This research approaches the subject with interdisciplinary balance. From biblical theology, it considers how Scripture frames giving in law and grace. From patristic theology, it analyzes direct quotations from eight major Fathers. From systematic theology, it examines how Christian giving relates to the Cross, the abolition of ceremonial law, and the law of charity. From pastoral theology, it offers implications for today's Church, guided by canonical norms and lived ecclesial experience.

The objective is not merely historical description, but theological synthesis. The conclusion proposes a contemporary model- *Sacrificial Generous Giving*- that resonates with the Fathers, aligning with Scripture, and responding to pastoral realities without re-imposing abrogated legal structures.

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Methodology

This study employs a patristic-textual analytic method, drawing exclusively from primary quotations from the Fathers of the Church. These texts form the sole evidential base for interpreting how the Church Fathers understood tithing in relation to Scripture, ecclesial life, and Christian morality. The method proceeds in three steps:

- i. Extraction of Patristic Voice: Each Father's direct statements on tithing or Christian giving are treated as theological data, not as historical anecdotes. The goal is to hear their doctrinal arguments, spiritual emphases, and ecclesial concerns.
- ii. Comparative Theological Reading: Points of convergence and divergence among the Fathers are examined to understand the broader theological continuum. This avoids any false homogenization and preserves distinct patristic emphases.
- iii. Contextualization within Christian Theology: Insights from the Fathers are integrated with biblical theology (Old vs. New Covenant, law vs. grace), systematic theology (ecclesiology, soteriology, moral theology), and pastoral theology (Church practice, canonical obligations, contemporary realities).

This research approaches the patristic material in a manner consistent with academic theological research: analytical, synthetic, historically aware, and pastorally sensitive.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by a fourfold theological framework that shapes interpretation and synthesis.

a. Biblical-Theological Foundation

Tithing in Scripture transitions from pre-Mosaic voluntary acts (Abram and Jacob) to

legally required offerings under Mosaic ceremonial law:

- i. Abram “gave Melchizedek one-tenth” after battle. (Gen 14:20)
- ii. Jacob “promised... to give a tenth of all” God gives him. (Gen 28:22)
- iii. Tithing was regulated in Numbers 18:21 and reaffirmed after the Exile (Nehemiah 10:32–39).

Yet, in the New Testament era, giving becomes characterized by cheerfulness, freedom, generosity, and charity, edging away from fixed legal quantifications. The Fathers interpret this biblical shift differently; their disagreements themselves become part of the data.

b. Patristic-Theological Framework

The Fathers are not uniform in their views. Their comments reveal at least four theological positions:

- i. Tithing Abrogated with the Old Law: (e.g., St. Irenaeus: the old servile system is replaced by free giving in Christ.)
- ii. Tithing as Moral/Spiritual Training: (e.g., St. Clement: tithing cultivates piety, justice, and humanity.)
- iii. Tithing as Voluntary Almsgiving: (e.g., Tertullian: monthly offerings are freely given without compulsion.)
- iv. Tithing Continued for Clergy Support and Charity: (e.g., Cyprian, Chrysostom, Augustine: Christians ought not give less than the Jews; support of clergy and the poor remains a divine duty.)

This diversity reveals a dynamic and living tradition, not a monolithic one.

c. Systematic-Theological Foundation

Three doctrinal questions shape the study:

- i. What is the relationship between the Old Law and the New Law?: With Christ's death, ceremonial laws- including tithing-are fulfilled and no longer binding as law.
- ii. What remains binding under the New Covenant?: Charity, justice, and support for clergy and the poor remain perpetual moral duties.
- iii. What is the Christian meaning of giving?: Giving becomes an act of grace, not legal compulsion. The Fathers repeatedly link giving with spiritual freedom, love, and sacrifice.

Thus, Christian giving is understood as part of the economy of grace, not merely of the economy of money.

d. Pastoral-Theological Foundation

Contemporary pastoral practice, reflected in Canon Law (can. 222), echoes the Fathers:

the faithful must support the Church and help the poor, but no percentage is mandated. The document notes that tithing re-emerged in Church discipline in the 6th century primarily as a structural and financial necessity, not as a restored ceremonial law. Hence, the modern Church must:

- i. Avoid legalism (since the legal requirement died with the Old Law).
- ii. Avoid laxity (since Christian charity demands generosity).
- iii. Form consciences toward ***Sacrificial Generous Giving***, a theological development rooted in patristic thought.

3. Background: The Origins and Development of Tithing

a. Pre-Mosaic Origins

Tithing begins not with legal obligation but with voluntary thanksgiving. Abram's gift to Melchizedek and Jacob's vow exemplify offerings motivated by covenantal gratitude rather than compulsion. This early voluntary character becomes crucial later when some Fathers argue that Christian giving must mirror this freedom.

b. Mosaic Codification

Under Moses, tithing becomes a structured religious system:

- i. It sustains the Levites who “received no land.”
- ii. It supports temple worship.
- iii. It functions as a social welfare mechanism for strangers, widows, and orphans.

The document states:

“The Law simply regulated the tithe. The purpose of tithing this time was to maintain the Levitical priests so that they should concentrate on their priestly duties. Thus, tithing becomes both ceremonial and economic.

c. New Testament Transition

Jesus acknowledges Jewish tithing practices yet redirects moral focus to “the weightier matters” of charity and justice. After the Resurrection, the Christian community shifts toward cheerful giving, communal sharing, and almsgiving- a transformation the Fathers interpret differently.

d. Early Christian Practice

It is evidently clear that some Jews kept this practice during the time of Jesus (Luke 18:12; Matthew 23:23). However after the death of Jesus, in the early church, this practice seemed to diminish or even been replaced by another practice of cheerful giving as seen in the letters of St. Paul and Acts of the Apostles. However, The Apostolic Constitution affirms this practice in the early church. This explains why patristic comments vary: they were responding to communities without uniform tithing practices.

4. Patristic Perspectives on Tithing: Analytical Presentation

This section presents theological expositions of some of the Church Fathers. Each Father expresses a unique voice, revealing the diversity and depth of early Christian reflection on tithing, giving, charity, and the New Covenant.

a. St. Irenaeus of Lyons: Tithing as an Abrogated Servile Obligation

St. Irenaeus provides one of the clearest arguments for the cessation of legal tithing in the Christian era. His contrast between the Old Covenant “slaves” and New Covenant “freemen” forms the theological core of his argument. In *Against Heresy*, Bk. IV, chapter XVIII, section 2, St. Irenaeus says,

And the class of oblations in general has not been set aside; for there were both oblations there [among the Jews], and there are oblations here [among the Christians]. Sacrifices there were among the people; sacrifices there are, too, in the Church: but the species alone has been changed, inasmuch as the offering is now made, not by slaves, but by freemen. For the Lord is [ever] one and the same; but the character of a servile oblation is peculiar [to itself], as is also that of freemen, in order that, by the very oblations, the indication of liberty may be set forth. For with Him there is nothing purposeless, nor without signification, nor without design. And for this reason they (the Jews) had indeed the tithes of their goods consecrated to Him, but those who have received liberty set aside all their possessions for the Lord's purposes, bestowing joyfully and freely not the less valuable portions of their property, since they have the hope of better things [hereafter]; as that poor widow acted who cast all her living into the treasury of God.

And for this reason did the Lord, instead of that [commandment], Thou shall not commit adultery,” forbid even concupiscence; and instead of that which runs thus, “Thou shall not kill,” He prohibited anger; and instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [He told us] to share all our possessions with the poor; and not to love our neighbors only, but even our enemies; and not merely to be liberal givers and bestowers, but even that we should present a gratuitous gift to those who take away our goods.

For Irenaeus, tithing belonged to a “servile oblation” tied to compulsory law. Christians, set free by Christ, are no longer bound to such compulsory economic obligations. Most striking is his explicit statement: “Instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [Christ told us] to share all our possessions with the poor.” Here, Irenaeus offers two theological principles: Tithing, as law, is replaced (not retained) by Christ. And Christian giving is characterized not by payment but by sharing.

His distinction between “to pay” and “to share” reveals a profound theological insight: to pay is obligation under law and to share is act of love under grace. Thus, for Irenaeus, the Cross does not *modify* tithing, rather it abolishes it as a legal requirement. Christian giving is limitless, joyful, and rooted in charity, not taxation.

b. St. Clement of Alexandria: Tithing as Moral Formation and Divine Generosity

Clement maintains a more positive attitude toward tithing but reframes it spiritually rather than legally. In the *Stromata*, 2.18, St. Clement says,

And in the harvest the owners are prohibited from appropriating what falls from the handfuls; as also in reaping [the law] enjoins a part to be left unreaped; signally thereby training those who possess to sharing and to large-heartedness, by foregoing of their own to those who are in want, and thus providing means of subsistence for the poor. You see how the law proclaims at once the righteousness and goodness of God, who dispenses food to all ungrudgingly. And in the vintage it prohibited the grape-gatherers from going back again on what had been left, and from gathering the fallen grapes; and the same injunctions are given to the olive-gatherers. Besides, the tithes of the fruit and of the flocks taught both piety towards the Deity, and not covetously to grasp everything, but to communicate gifts of kindness to one's neighbours. For it was from these, I reckon, and from the first-fruits that the priests were maintained. We now therefore understand that we are instructed in piety, and in liberality, and in justice, and in humanity by the law.

He emphasizes that the purpose of Old Testament giving laws was moral transformation: "Signally thereby training those who possess to sharing and to large-heartedness... providing means of subsistence for the poor." For Clement, tithing teaches: Piety, Justice, Humanity and Liberality. He affirms: "Besides, the tithes... taught both piety towards the Deity, and not covetously to grasp everything, but to communicate gifts of kindness to one's neighbours." This is not legalism; it is spiritual pedagogy. Clement sees continuity, but not in a juridical sense: Christians remain obliged to the *virtue* behind tithing, not to its exact legal form. Tithing becomes a symbol of God's generosity and the believer's benevolence.

c. Tertullian: Tithing Replaced by Voluntary Monthly Offerings

Tertullian provides some of the earliest evidence of organized Christian giving- **not tithing**, but free, voluntary donations. He writes:

There is no buying and selling of any sort in the things of God. Though we have our treasure-chest, it is not made up of purchase-money, as of a religion that has its price. *On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary.* These gifts are, as it were, piety's deposit fund. For they are not taken thence and spent on feasts, and drinking-bouts, and eating-houses, but to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls, destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house; such, too, as have suffered shipwreck; and if there happen to be any in the mines, or banished to the islands, or shut up in the prisons, for nothing but their fidelity to the cause of God's Church, they become the nurslings of their confession. But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us.

He writes, "On the monthly day, if he likes, each puts in a small donation; but only if it be his pleasure, and only if he be able: for there is no compulsion; all is voluntary." This is a total departure from Mosaic tithing. He explains the purpose of the Church's treasury: to support and bury the poor, to care for orphans, to care for the elderly and housebound and to support persecuted Christians

These correspond directly to the corporal works of mercy. Thus, Tertullian offers a framework of charity without compulsion, giving without legal percentages- a purely grace-based model of giving. This is Christian giving *before* the later canonical reintroduction of the term "tithing."

d. St. Cyprian of Carthage: Tithing Continued for Clergy Support and Ecclesial Order

St. Cyprian offers one of the strongest patristic defenses of tithing's **ecclesial continuity**. He argues:

... The form of which ordination and engagement the [Levites](#) formerly observed under the law, so that when the eleven tribes divided the land and shared the possessions, the Levitical tribe, which was left free for the temple and the altar, and for the divine ministries, received nothing from that portion of the division; but while others cultivated the soil, that portion only cultivated the favour of [God](#), and received the [tithes](#) from the eleven tribes, for their food and maintenance, from the fruits which grew. All which was done by divine authority and arrangement, so that they who waited on divine services might in no respect be called away, nor be compelled to consider or to transact secular business. Which plan and rule is now maintained in respect of the [clergy](#), that they who are promoted by clerical ordination in the [Church](#) of the Lord may be called off in no respect from the divine administration, nor be tied down by worldly anxieties and matters; but in the [honour](#) of the brethren who contribute, receiving as it were tenths of the fruits, they may not withdraw from the altars and [sacrifices](#), but may serve day and night in heavenly and spiritual things.

Cyprian opines that: The Levitical principle carries over to Christian clergy, clerics should not be distracted by secular work and support of ministers is the duty of the faithful.

Most significantly, he affirms: Christians, "in the honour of the brethren who contribute, receiving as it were tenths of the fruits, may not withdraw from the altars and sacrifices." Cyprian does not insist on a legal tenth, but speaks of it as a continued ecclesial custom rooted in divine arrangement. His theology is not Old Law legalism, but New Law pastoral necessity.

e. St. Methodius of Olympus: Tithing as a Vow, Not a Law

Methodius departs from legal or obligatory frameworks, situating tithing among **voluntary vows**.

He writes:

For the passage runs thus: “And the Lord spoke unto [Moses](#), saying, Speak unto the children of [Israel](#), and say unto them, when either man or [woman](#) shall separate themselves ... unto the Lord.” One vows to offer gold and silver vessels for the sanctuary when he comes, another to offer the [tithe](#) of his fruits, another of his property, another the best of his flocks, another consecrates his being; and no one is able to vow a great vow to the Lord, but he who has offered himself entirely to [God](#).

In St. Methodius, tithing is one of the vows that one can make to God. He enumerates some of such vows like:

- i. vow to offer gold and silver vessels for the sanctuary when he comes,
- ii. vow to offer the [tithe](#) of his fruits,
- iii. vow to offer his property,
- iv. vow to offer the best of his flocks,
- v. vow to consecrate his being

Thus, tithing equates to a vow that is free, voluntary and personal. Methodius' theology makes tithing an act of personal consecration, not institutional obligation. Once vowed, it must be fulfilled; but the vow itself is not commanded.

f. St. Augustine: Christians Should Give More, Not Less, than the Tithing Jews

Augustine offers the most developed theological reflection among the Fathers quoted.

He observes:

...I suppose then that they recalled this to [mind](#), and thought that the Lord Christ was speaking to no purpose, as if to those who did not give [alms](#); whereas they [knew](#) their own doings, how that they tithed, and gave [alms](#) of the minutest and most trifling of their produce. ... That ye may [know](#), I am aware of your [alms](#). Doubtless these [tithes](#) are your [alms](#); yea even the minutest and most trifling of your fruits do ye [tithe](#); “Yet ye leave the weightier matters of the law, judgment and charity.” Mark. Ye have “left judgment and charity,” and you [tithe](#) herbs. This is not to do [alms](#). “These,” saith [says] He, “ought ye to do, and not to leave the other undone.” Do what? “Judgment and charity, [justice](#) and mercy;” and “not to leave the other undone.” Do these; but give the preference to the others.

The [Scribes](#) and [Pharisees](#) gave the tenth. How is it with you? Ask yourselves. Consider what you do, and with what means you do it; how much you give, how much you leave for yourselves; what you spend on mercy, what you reserve for luxury. So then, “Let them distribute easily, let them communicate, let them lay up in

store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come,
that they may hold on [eternal](#) life.

He argues, “They tithed all they had... It is no easy matter to find a Christian who doth as much.” He then challenges Christians directly: “The Scribes and Pharisees gave the tenth. How is it with you?” His argument unfolds as follows:

- i. Jews gave a tenth under law.
- ii. Christians live under grace.
- iii. Therefore, Christians must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.
- iv. Hence, Christian generosity must surpass tithing- not minimally replicate it.

He further writes: “Let them give a certain portion... not the whole... A tenth? The Scribes and Pharisees gave tithes... Except your righteousness exceeds theirs, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Augustine sees tithing as a minimum standard of generosity: not binding, but morally instructive- while Christian charity aims beyond it.

g. St. John Cassia: The Spiritualization of Tithing- A Tithe of One's Life

He writes:

Thou [You] shall offer to the Lord your God your [tithes](#) and first fruits.” [Exodus22:29](#) And so, while we are commanded to offer [tithes](#) of our substance and all our fruits, it is much more needful for us to offer [tithes](#) of our life and ordinary employments and actions, which certainly is clearly arranged for in the calculation of Lent. For the [tithe](#) of the number of all the days included in the revolving circle of the year is thirty-six days and a half. But in seven weeks, if Sundays and Saturdays are subtracted, there remain thirty-five days assigned for [fasting](#). But by the addition of [Easter](#) Eve when the Saturday's fast is prolonged to the cock-crowing at the dawn of [Easter](#) Day, not only is the number of thirty-six days made up, but in regard to the [tithe](#) of the five days which seemed to be over, if the bit of the night which was added be taken into account nothing will be wanting to the whole sum.

Cassian offers a unique mystical interpretation. He writes that Christians must offer: “Not only tithes of our substance... but tithes of our life and ordinary employments and actions.” This represents a radical spiritualization of the concept of tithing. He calculates Lent as a tithe of the year, teaching that time itself becomes an offering. Thus, for Cassian, tithing is spiritual, personal, ascetical and expresses total consecration. This expands tithing from economics to spirituality, from money to life.

h. St. John Chrysostom: Strongest Advocate for Christian Tithing as Almsgiving

Chrysostom is the most forceful patristic support for tithing as a Christian moral duty. He laments:

Woe to him, it is said, who doeth [does] not [alms](#); and if this was the case under the Old Covenant, much more is it under the New. If, where the getting of [wealth](#) was allowed, and the enjoyment of it, and the care of it, there was such provision made for the succoring the [poor](#), how much more in that Dispensation, where we are commanded to surrender all we have? For what did not they of old do? They gave [tithes](#), and [tithes](#) again upon [tithes](#) for [orphans](#), [widows](#), and strangers; whereas some one was saying to me in astonishment at another, “Why, such one gives [tithes](#).” What a load of disgrace does this expression imply, since what was not a matter of wonder with the [Jews](#) has come to be so in the case of the [Christians](#)? If there was danger then in omitting [tithes](#), think how great it must be now.

He warns that neglecting almsgiving provokes divine wrath: “Woe to him who doeth not alms....If there was danger then in omitting tithes, how much greater now?”

He reasons that: Jews gave generously under a lesser covenant, Christians, commanded by Christ to surrender everything, must give even more, and Tithing becomes an expression of mercy and justice, not legalism.

Chrysostom links tithing directly to salvation themes:

- i. Failure to give leads to condemnation (Matthew 25).
- ii. Charity is the measure of righteousness.
- iii. Refusal to give is worse than paganism.

Thus, Chrysostom reinterprets tithing as an obligation of love, not of law.

5. A Theological Synthesis

This section draws together the theological movements observed in the Fathers and situates them within the larger framework of Christian doctrine. The goal is not merely to compare opinions but to unveil the theological logic that binds and differentiates them. By integrating the biblical witness, patristic reflections, doctrinal principles, and pastoral realities, we arrive at a nuanced and deeply ecclesial understanding of authentic contemporary Christian giving.

5.1 From Law to Grace: The Biblical-Theological Pathway

a. Old Testament Giving

Tithing in the Old Covenant was a codified obligation, anchored in the ceremonial law. Its purposes included:

- i. Sustaining the Levites, who had no inheritance of land.
- ii. Supporting temple worship and religious festivals.
- iii. Providing a social safety net for widows, orphans, and strangers.

This demonstrates that tithing had *cultic* and *economic* significance.

b. New Testament Giving

With Christ, giving is no longer structured around percentages but around the heart. Acts,

the Pauline epistles, and the teachings of Jesus emphasize: cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7), Total self-offering (Mark 10:21), communal sharing (Acts 2-4) and generosity motivated by love, not legal obligation (Luke 6:38). The Fathers interpret this shift in diverse ways, but all agree: Christian giving exceeds the minimum measure of the law.

5.2 Patristic Theology: Four Theological Approaches

The Fathers' reflections reveal four major theological approaches:

a. Tithing Abrogated by Christ (Irenaeus)

Irenaeus represents the theological position that tithing, as part of Old Law ceremonial worship, ends with the Cross: "Instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [Christ told us] to share all our possessions with the poor." This suggests three key themes:

- i. The Cross inaugurates the freedom of the New Covenant.
- ii. Obligation is replaced by charitable abundance.
- iii. Christian giving is qualitatively superior to tithing, not numerically equivalent.

b. Tithing as Moral Formation (Clement)

Clement sees tithing not as law but as **moral pedagogy**, forming the believer in piety, justice, humanity and generosity. He writes that the giving laws were meant to train Israel in virtue:

"Training those who possess to sharing and to large-heartedness." Tithing is a school of charity, not a permanent legal template.

c. Voluntary Ecclesial Giving (Tertullian, Methodius, Cassian)

These Fathers emphasize:

- i. No compulsion (Tertullian: "only if he likes... only if he be able").
- ii. Giving as a vow (Methodius).
- iii. Giving as ascetic consecration, even a "tithe of our life" (Cassian).

This theological approach stresses freedom, spiritual self-offering, and a vision of giving integrated into one's entire Christian existence.

d. Tithing as Christian Duty for Clergy and Poor (Cyprian, Augustine, Chrysostom)

These Fathers do not reinstate tithing as Mosaic law but reinterpret it through charity, justice, and ecclesial necessity. Cyprian teaches: Clergy "receiving as it were tenths of the fruits" allows them to serve "day and night in heavenly and spiritual things." Augustine argues Christians should exceed the Jews: "The Scribes and Pharisees gave the tenth. How is it with you?" Chrysostom is even stronger: "If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great now." Here, tithing is not legal requirement but moral baseline, pastoral necessity and expression of New Covenant mercy.

5.3 Tithe in the Light of Patristic Systematic Theology

Irenaeus argues that "Tithing in the Old Law is one of the ceremonial laws... abrogated by the death of Christ on the Cross." Therefore tithing as law is null, tithing as principle of charity can continue and Christian giving must be evaluated through the lens of grace, not law. Thus, the Cross transforms obligation into gift.

Christ transforms: sacrifice into self-offering, obligation into charity, legal percentages

into free generosity and temple taxation into ecclesial communion. In this economy of grace, giving is an act of participation in Christ's self-emptying. The measure is not the tenth, but the totality of love. Thus, even Fathers who defend tithing do so theologically, not legally. In addition, Christian giving is a participation in divine generosity. Clement's theology is crucial here: God gives "ungrudgingly," and tithing teaches imitation of divine largesse. Christian giving imitates the divine generosity revealed in the Eucharist, where Christ offers himself "freely."

5.4 Pastoral Theology: Relevance for the Contemporary Church

According to the Catholic Encyclopaedia, the earliest mention of tithing was in a letter by some bishops assembled at Tours in 567 AD. And the early church's expectation that every Christian would tithe found formal expression in the canons of the Council of Mâcon in 585 AD, which included the practice in canon law; although it was enforced later. However, the Council of Trent provided for excommunication if any Catholic refuses to contribute his tithe, which was strongly attacked by some reformers.

Contemporary, the church does not legally bind Tithing. Canon 222 §1 states that "Christ's faithful have the obligation to provide for the needs of the Church, so that the Church has available to it those things which are necessary for divine worship, for works of the apostolate and of charity and for the worthy support of its ministers". §2 states "they are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the Lord's precept, to help the poor from their own resources". Tithing therefore is no longer binding but can be honoured as a sacred tradition through which charity can be made. However, that tithing is no longer binding does not eliminate the attitude of tithing from the fulfilled context of the Law. Thus, contemporary pastoral practice aligns more with Tertullian and Methodius than with Mosaic law.

However, many Christians:

- i. Misunderstand tithing as a salvific requirement.
- ii. Feel guilt or fear rather than charity.
- iii. Treat giving as a transaction rather than an offering.

But the Fathers help correct this by rooting giving in: freedom, charity, ecclesial communion, concern for the poor, clerical support and spiritual growth.

It is very obvious from our discussions that the implications of tithing have been abrogated by the Cross of Christ. We have evidences of post-Cross method of supporting the church through free-will giving (Matthew 10:8; Luke 6:38; Acts 20:35; II Cor. 9: 6-7; I Tim. 5:8). The common sense tells us that this method of support may not yield much because it is a free-will sacrifice. St. Paul in this line of thought says "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

It is from this point of view that the researcher advocates for a new name that could replace the present concept of Tithing in the post-Cross Church- ***Sacrificial Generous Giving***. This kind of giving is characterized by sacrifice, freedom and love. It is a sacrifice because it costs you something; it is free because it is voluntarily done; and it is a love act because it is an expression of love to the things of God. People do this kind of giving during bazaars, monthly donations (*Afam di ya*), seed sowing, first and second collections during Masses, and other means of giving generously.

These generous acts have replaced the need of tithing. However, this does not prohibit one to give according to the Old Testament measures. One can still practice that method of measuring of his giving, not compulsorily but freely.

The time to make this kind of giving is personal but the Church helps one to be conscious of the needed time to support the Church financially and likely in other situations. Reception of this kind of giving is specifically reserved to those in clerical state. This Sacrificial Generous Giving is used to support the priests and ministers of God, to assist the poor, and to support God's work.

6. Contemporary Implications: Reading The Fathers For Today's Church

This section applies the theological synthesis to the life of the contemporary Church. Drawing from the patristic insights, biblical mandate, doctrinal clarity, and pastoral realities explored earlier, we develop a coherent and spiritually mature framework for Christian giving suited to our time.

The unanimous doctrinal foundation is clear: tithing as a legal obligation died with the Old Covenant. This echoes the theological logic of Irenaeus and the spiritual-pastoral expressions of Tertullian, Methodius, and Cassian. Thus, in today's Church:

- i. No Christian is bound to a mandatory 10%.
- ii. No salvific or moral guilt attaches to giving less than a tithe.
- iii. Compulsion contradicts the New Covenant of charity and freedom.

This must be emphasized pastorally to liberate consciences and uphold authentic Christian doctrine.

Though legal tithing is abrogated, Christian charity is not optional. It is a divine command rooted in Jesus' teaching, apostolic practice, and patristic witness.

St. Irenaeus states that Christ commands us: "To share all our possessions with the poor." St. Augustine challenges Christians to exceed Jewish tithing: "The Scribes and Pharisees gave the tenth. How is it with you?" And St. Chrysostom warns: "If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great it must be now." Thus, Christian giving is measured not by percentages, but by love; oriented not towards law, but towards mercy; and expressed not in obligation, but in generosity. The new measure is the Cross, not the tenth. St. Cyprian's teaching remains essential for pastoral practice: Clergy, "receiving as it were tenths of the fruits," may "serve day and night in heavenly and spiritual things." The principle endures:

- i. Clergy should be free from secular distraction.
- ii. The faithful must support their ministers materially.
- iii. The Church's mission depends on the generosity of her members.

Thus, while the tenth is not required, financial support of the Church is a serious religious duty grounded in both Scripture and tradition.

Clement teaches that giving trains the believer: "In piety, and in liberality, and in justice, and in humanity." Methodius re-imagines tithing as a vow, a voluntary offering of love. Cassian spiritualizes tithing as: "Tithes of our life and ordinary employments and actions."

This pastoral insight is crucial today:

- i. Christian giving must form character.
- ii. Giving must shape the heart toward mercy.
- iii. Giving must express one's total self-offering to God.

Thus, true giving is not monetary alone- it is existential.

On the other hand, modern interpretations of tithing by some people have created different pastoral problems such as:

- i. Fear-based preaching
- ii. Guilt-driven appeals
- iii. Prosperity distortions
- iv. Legalistic misinterpretations of Old Testament texts

The Fathers offer corrective teachings against the contemporary erroneous propagation of tithing: Irenaeus (Giving is free, not forced), Tertullian (Offerings are voluntary), Augustine & Chrysostom (Generosity exceeds obligation), Cyprian (Support clergy for spiritual reasons, not legal ones) and Cassian (Giving transforms the soul, not merely the purse). Thus, the Church must teach giving in a manner consistent with patristic theology and the New Covenant.

7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that tithing, though deeply rooted in biblical and historical tradition, cannot be transplanted into the New Covenant as a legal mandate. The testimony of the Church Fathers- diverse yet harmonious in theological principles- that Christian giving is grounded in:

- i. Freedom, not compulsion (Irenaeus, Tertullian)
- ii. Virtue formation, not legal requirement (Clement)
- iii. Pastoral necessity, not Mosaic obligation (Cyprian)
- iv. Surpassing righteousness, not minimum percentages (Augustine, Chrysostom)
- v. Spiritual self-offering, not mere financial calculation (Cassian, Methodius)

While the Church historically re-employed the term *tithe*, it did so for practical reasons after Constantine- not to reinstate the ceremonial law.

Today, the Church is called to teach the faithful a mature theology of giving rooted in Scripture and the Fathers: giving as love, giving as discipleship, giving as participation in Christ's self-offering, giving as communion with the poor, giving as support for God's ministers. Therefore, in continuity with the Fathers and in fidelity to the New Covenant, we conclude: Tithing is no longer a law, but generous giving is an essential expression of Christian life. The proper model for the Church today is Sacrificial Generous Giving- free, loving, and rooted in grace.

Endnotes

- ^{1.} “All the first-fruits of the winepress, the threshing-floor, the oxen, and the sheep, shalt thou give to the priests,
2. that thy storehouses and garners and the products of thy land may be blessed, and thou mayst be strengthened with corn and wine and oil, and the herds of thy cattle and flocks of thy sheep may be increased. Thou shalt give the tenth of thy increase to theophany, and to the widow, and to the poor, and to the stranger. All the first-fruits of other things, shalt thou give to the priests; but those of silver, and of garments, and of all sort of possessions, to the orphan and to the widow.” { *Apostolic Constitution*, Bk VII, Section II, XXIX, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 471.}
- ^{3.} St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresy*, Bk. IV, chap. XVIII, 2, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-*
- ^{4.} *Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 484-485.
- ^{5.} St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresy*, Bk. IV, chap. XIII, 3, 477.
- ^{6.} St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 2.18, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene*
- ^{7.} *Fathers*, vol. 2 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 366.
- ^{8.} Tertullian, *Apology*, chap. XXXIX, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.
- ^{9.} 3 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 46.
- ^{10.} St. Cyprian, *The Epistles*, LXV, 1, in Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5
- ^{11.} (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 367.
- ^{12.} St. Methodius, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, Discourse V, chap. 1, in Alexander Roberts & James
- ^{13.} Donaldson, eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 325.
- ^{14.} St. Augustine, *Sermons on New-Testament Lessons*, Sermon 56, 3, in Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, eds.
- ^{15.} *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 6 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 435-436.
- ^{16.} St. Augustine, *Sermons on New-Testament Lessons*, Sermon 35, 5, in Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, eds.
- ^{17.} *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 6 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 435-436.
- ^{18.} St. John Cassian, *Conferences*, 21, chap. XXV, in Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene and Post-Nicene*
- ^{19.} *Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 11 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 513.
- ^{20.} St. Chrysostom, Homily 4 On Ephesians, Chapter II, verses 1-3, in Philip Schaff & Henry Wace, eds. *Nicene*
- ^{21.} *and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 13 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 69.