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A Theological Review of Offering Collection Styles and Their Impact on Reverence and Worship

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Abstract

This article examined whether the method used to collect offerings in Christian worship affects reverence, participation, and the theological meaning of giving. The problem arises from diverse contemporary practices: some congregations invite worshipers to come forward to a central point, others pass plates, bags, or baskets through seated rows, and still others depend on fixed receptacles, secure boxes, or digital giving. A qualitative literature review with thematic analysis was employed to synthesize biblical, historical, liturgical, and practical sources. Five themes emerged: offering as embodied worship; space, movement, and attention; reverence and liturgical flow; dignity, voluntariness, and non-coercion; and stewardship accountability. The review found that Scripture does not prescribe a single universal mechanism for collecting offerings, but it consistently treats giving as voluntary, accountable, worshipful, and oriented toward God and neighbor. Historical evidence shows movement from temple treasuries and early Christian collections for the needy to later offertory processions, alms basins, pew-based collections, and modern electronic giving. The study concludes that method matters, not because one style is inherently holy and all others are unbiblical, but because collection practices teach theology through repeated bodily habits. Churches should therefore evaluate offering collection styles by how well they preserve reverence, avoid compulsion, honor the vulnerable, maintain accountability, and visibly connect giving with worship rather than fundraising.

Keywords: Offerings, Worship, Reverence, Liturgy, Stewardship, Church Practice

1. Introduction

In many Christian churches, the receiving of tithes and offerings has become a contested moment in worship. In some congregations, worshipers walk forward and place their gifts at a pulpit, altar, basket, or designated treasury. In others, deacons, deaconesses, ushers, or stewards move through the aisles and extend plates, bags, baskets, or envelopes to worshipers who remain seated. In still other settings, the church places secure boxes near entrances or encourages online giving before, during, or after the service. The practical question seems simple: which method is most convenient? Yet the theological question is deeper: does the method of receiving offerings shape the congregation's experience of reverence, participation, and worship?

The concern behind this paper comes from a biblical intuition. In the Old Testament, a chest associated with temple repair was placed in a fixed location where people deposited gifts for the house of the Lord. The biblical text most clearly describing this chest belongs to the reign of Joash/Jehoash, under the priest Jehoiada, while Josiah's reform also involved funds gathered for temple repair but is narrated differently.[1] In the New Testament, Jesus sat opposite the temple treasury and watched people placing gifts into the receptacles, praising the poor widow whose small gift represented extraordinary devotion.[2] These texts raise a legitimate question: if biblical patterns show worshipers bringing offerings to a treasury, how did churches move toward collection styles in which church officers reach seated worshipers?

This question must be handled carefully. The Bible offers important patterns but not a detailed manual for every later congregational setting. The temple treasury was attached to a unique sacrificial institution, not to a modern church auditorium. The early church gathered in homes, rented spaces, and public

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1 2 Kings 12:4-16 and 2 Chronicles 24:8-11 describe Jehoiada's chest during the reign of Joash/Jehoash; 2 Kings 22:3-7 and 2 Chronicles 34:9-13 describe temple repair funds in Josiah's reign. Unless otherwise noted, biblical references in this paper follow the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVue).

2 Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4. The scene is the Jerusalem temple treasury, not a synagogue. John 8:20 also places Jesus' teaching near the temple treasury.

places before purpose-built church buildings became common. Later Christian traditions

developed different practices according to architecture, theology, pastoral needs, security concerns, and understandings of the offertory. Therefore, the question is not simply whether a central box is biblical and a passed plate is unbiblical. Rather, the question is whether a collection method faithfully expresses the biblical meaning of giving while protecting reverence and avoiding practices that turn worship into pressure, spectacle, or interruption.

The term 'reverence' in this study refers to a worshipful disposition and order that directs attention to God. It includes awe, humility, grateful response, and disciplined care for the sacred purpose of corporate worship. Reverence may include silence, but it is not identical with silence. A joyful procession can be reverent; a quiet but manipulative appeal can be irreverent. Likewise, movement through the congregation is not automatically irreverent; it becomes problematic when it distracts from prayer, creates social pressure, interrupts the proclamation of the Word, or treats giving as extraction rather than offering.[3]

The purpose of this paper is to examine the historical and theological movement from biblical treasury patterns to contemporary offering collection styles and to assess how these practices may affect reverence and worship. The paper argues that the method does matter because methods are not neutral containers. Repeated liturgical actions form congregational imagination. They teach whether giving is an act of worship, a financial transaction, a social obligation, or a response to grace.

Problem Statement

The research problem is that many churches defend the collection of offerings as part of worship while giving little theological attention to the manner in which offerings are received. Where deacons or ushers move through the congregation, some worshipers may experience the action as inclusive and orderly, while others may experience it as intrusive, distracting, or coercive.

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[33] 1 Cor 14:40; Heb 12:28-29. Reverence in this paper is not reduced to quietness only; it denotes a worshipful ordering of body, space, speech, and attention before God.

Where members come forward, some may experience the action as reverent and participatory, while others may feel exposed if they have nothing to give. Where secure boxes or digital giving are used, some may experience dignity and freedom, while others may feel that the offering has disappeared from worship. The lack of sustained theological reflection on method can leave churches repeating inherited practices without evaluating their formative effect.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the biblical and historical patterns that have shaped Christian offering practices.
2. To investigate how Christian churches transitioned from treasury or presentation-based offering practices to seated collection styles.
3. To identify theological and pastoral principles that can guide churches in choosing offering collection styles that are biblically faithful, theologically meaningful, reverent, and pastorally sensitive.

1.2 Research Questions

The study is guided by three research questions;

1. What biblical and historical patterns inform Christian offering practices?
2. How did Christian churches move from treasury or presentation-based patterns to seated collection styles?
3. What principles can guide churches in choosing collection styles that are biblically faithful, theologically meaningful, and pastorally sensitive?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Biblical Foundations: Treasury, Voluntary Giving and Accountability

The Old Testament presents giving as both a covenant obligation and a grateful response. Tithes, freewill offerings, first fruits, temple gifts, and alms are not identical categories, yet they share a common orientation: Israel gave to honor God, sustain worship,

support priests and Levites, and care for the vulnerable.[4] The temple repair narratives were especially relevant. In 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 24, Jehoiada made a chest, bore a hole in its lid, and placed it near the altar or gate area so that people could bring money for the repair of the temple. This arrangement emphasized a visible but controlled receptacle, public confidence, and accountable use of funds. In Josiah's time, the text highlights money gathered from the people and entrusted to workers for temple repair, but it does not describe the same chest arrangement in the same detail.

Thus, while the concern for temple offerings in Josiah's reform is valid, the classic 'collection box' precedent comes from Joash/Jehoash. Second Temple Judaism also knew treasury arrangements. Later rabbinic tradition referred to multiple temple receptacles used for specified offerings, including freewill gifts.[5] The Gospel narratives of the widow's offering belong in this temple context. Jesus observed people placing gifts into the treasury, but the narrative is not a celebration of public display. It was a critique of superficial valuation: large gifts may impress observers, but Jesus saw the widow's costly devotion.[6] This is crucial for the present question. Jesus' eyes were on the treasury, but his judgment was not based on the visibility of the amount; it was based on the heart and sacrifice known before God.

The New Testament church inherited Jewish patterns of almsgiving and mutual support but adapted them around the gospel, the Lord's Day gathering, and the needs of the saints. The book of Acts depicts believers sharing possessions so that none lacked necessities. Paul organized a collection for the Jerusalem believers and instructed churches to prepare gifts regularly so that the collection would not be hurried when he arrived.[7] The Pauline material emphasizes willingness, proportionality, advance preparation, accountability, and avoidance of compulsion. The

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44 Deut 16:16-17; Prov 3:9-10; Mal 3:8-10; Heb 13:15-16.

55 The Mishnah, trans. Jacob Neusner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), Shekalim 6:5. Later Jewish tradition describes multiple receptacles in the temple treasury, including receptacles for voluntary offerings.

66 Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4. The narrative emphasizes both Jesus' attention to the act of giving and his reversal of normal calculations of value.

77 Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; Rom 15:25-28; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9.

instruction that each person should give 'not reluctantly or under compulsion' remains central to evaluating collection styles.[8]

2.2 Early Christian and Liturgical Development

Second-century Christian evidence suggests that giving was integrated with the church's weekly gathering and directed toward works of mercy. Justin Martyr reports that those who were prosperous and willing gave what each chose, and what was collected was deposited with the president, who used it for orphans, widows, the sick, prisoners, strangers, and others in need.[9] This account is important because it shows giving as voluntary, communal, and diaconal. It does not describe deacons searching for people in the congregation, but it also does not prescribe a fixed treasury box. The emphasis lies on willing participation and responsible distribution.

Studies of the earliest Christian gatherings caution against reconstructing a single uniform practice. The first three centuries show diversity in meeting places, meal practices, leadership structures, and forms of collection.[10] As Eucharistic worship developed, the presentation of gifts became increasingly associated with the church's offering of bread, wine, alms, and the self-offering of the faithful. Liturgical historians note that offertory practices evolved alongside changes in Eucharistic theology, architecture, clerical roles, and congregational participation.[11] In traditions with a strong offertory procession, the people bring gifts forward, and the act of presentation symbolizes the offering of creation and life to God. In other traditions, especially within many Protestant communities, alms and money offerings became distinct from sacramental oblations but remained part of the ordered response to the Word.

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88 Matt 6:1-4; 2 Cor 9:7. These texts place giving under the disciplines of sincerity, secrecy where needed, and freedom from compulsion.

9 Justin Martyr, First Apology 67, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), 185-86.

10 Valeriy A. Alikin, The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 149-74.

11 Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, The Eucharistic Liturgies: Their Evolution and Interpretation (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 35-70.

The movement from central presentation to seated collection was influenced by practical and architectural changes. Pews, fixed seating, larger congregations, and orderly aisle systems made it efficient for designated officers to pass plates or bags. Deacons and stewards also carried responsibility for charity and church finance, which made their participation meaningful. However, efficiency can reshape theology. A method designed to help everyone participate can gradually communicate that the church is collecting from the people rather than that the people are offering to God.

Liturgical sources reveal that Christian traditions have often tried to preserve both dimensions: the congregation gives, and the church receives the gifts in an ordered way. In Roman Catholic practice, for example, the faithful may present bread, wine, and other gifts, but money or gifts for the poor are placed in a suitable place rather than
on the Eucharistic table.[12] Reformed traditions retained almsgiving as part of the church's response, with Calvin linking the gathered church to Word, prayer, sacrament, and alms.[13] These examples show that churches have adapted methods while seeking to preserve the theological identity of the offering.

2.3 Offering as Worship and Formation

Worship scholars consistently argue that Christian worship is not merely a sequence of useful activities but a formative encounter in which doctrine, desire, memory, and practice are joined. White's introduction to Christian worship treats liturgical forms as historically developed structures through which the church enacts faith.[14] Wainwright's classic account of doxology links worship, doctrine, and life, showing that the church's praise shapes what it believes and how it lives.[15] Saliers similarly understands worship as

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12 General Instruction of the Roman Missal, nos. 73 and 140, in The Roman Missal, 3rd typical ed. (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011).

13 John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.44.

14 James F. White, Introduction to Christian Worship, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 27-46.

15 Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 8-12.

theology in embodied, affective form: the prayers, gestures, and rhythms of worship shape Christian perception and response.[16]

This insight matters for the offering collection. A collection style is not merely a mechanical technique for moving money. It is a repeated ritual action. It locates the giver's body in space, directs attention toward or away from the altar or pulpit, creates a mood of gratitude or pressure, and teaches whether giving belongs to worship or administration. Lathrop's liturgical theology of 'holy things' emphasizes that meaning arises from the placement and relation of actions within the assembly.[17] Smith's work on cultural formation similarly argues that embodied practices train desire and imagination.[18] Therefore, even small liturgical details can carry deep formative significance.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literature review with thematic analysis. A literature review can function as a research methodology when it systematically gathers, interprets, and synthesizes existing scholarship to clarify a problem and develop conceptual insight.[19] The approach is appropriate because the research question concerns biblical interpretation, historical development, liturgical theology, and pastoral practice rather than numerical measurement.

The method does not claim to prove statistically that one collection style produces greater reverence. Instead, it identifies patterns and themes in relevant literature and develops criteria for ecclesial reflection. The amount for review included four categories of sources: (1) biblical texts on offerings, almsgiving, temple treasuries, and Pauline collections; (2) historical sources on early Christian gatherings and offertory development; (3) liturgical theology sources on worship, reverence, embodiment, and participation; and (4) contemporary pastoral sources addressing

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16 Don E. Saliers, Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 13-27.

17 Gordon W. Lathrop, Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 33-52.

18 James K. A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25-40.

19 Hannah Snyder, ‘Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines,’ Journal of Business Research 104 (2019): 333-39.

offering plates, secure boxes, pandemic-era adaptations, and digital giving.

Sources were selected for relevance to the research questions, theological importance, and usefulness for explaining the development of practice. Thematic analysis followed the broad logic of Braun and Clarke: familiarization with the corpus, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes against the data, definition and naming of themes, and writing the synthesis.[20]

Because the data consisted of texts rather than interviews, the process also drew from thematic synthesis methods used in qualitative reviews.[21] Initial codes included 'central treasury,' 'coming forward,' 'passing plate,' 'voluntary giving,' 'reverence,' 'visibility,' 'coercion,' 'accountability,' 'efficiency,' 'embodied participation,' and 'pastoral accommodation.' These codes were then grouped into five interpretive themes.

4. Thematic Coding Framework

The thematic coding framework organized the literature around five interpretive themes:

1. **Offering as embodied worship**: presentation, gratitude, response, and sacrifice. The guiding question was whether the method helps worshipers understand giving as a response to God.
2. **Space, movement, and attention**: treasury, procession, aisles, seated rows, and central focus. The guiding question was where the method directs the body and the congregation's attention.
3. **Reverence and liturgical flow**: silence, music, announcements, interruption, and decorum. The guiding question was whether the method strengthens or fragments the worship service.
4. **Dignity, voluntariness, and non-coercion**: public pressure, poverty, secrecy, inclusion, and shame. The guiding question was whether the method protects free and sincere giving.

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[20] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,' Qualitative Research in Psychology 3, no. 2 (2006): 77-101.

[21] James Thomas and Angela Harden, 'Methods for the Thematic Synthesis of Qualitative Research in Systematic Reviews,' BMC Medical Research Methodology 8 (2008): 45.

5. **Accountability and pastoral stewardship**: security, counting, designated officers, and transparency. The guiding question was whether the method maintains trust before God and people.

5. Findings: Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Offering is an embodied Act of Worship

The first theme is that giving in worship is embodied. In Scripture, people bring first fruits, present gifts, support the needy, and participate in communal collections. These actions involve bodies, hands, movement, and material goods. The offering is not merely a financial transaction; it is a visible response to God's provision and mission.[22]

A central treasury or forward movement makes this embodiment obvious: the worshiper physically approaches a designated place and releases the gift. A passed plate also involves embodiment: the worshiper receives, gives, and passes the plate to another. Digital giving can still be worshipful, but it requires intentional interpretation because the bodily sign may be less visible.

Theologically, the issue is not whether the worshiper moves forward or the plate moves to the worshiper. The deeper issue is whether the method preserves the meaning of the offering. If the act is framed as a grateful response to God, even a seated collection can be reverent. If the act is framed as a public test of loyalty or a fundraising interruption, even a central box can become irreverent. The method matters because it either supports or weakens the church's teaching about giving.

Theme 2: Space and Movement Shape Attention

The second theme concerns space and movement. In the temple narratives, the treasury or chest had a three-dimensional location. People came to it, and the receptacle symbolized ordered, accountable devotion. In many liturgical traditions, processions similarly organize movement toward a central place. The body moves toward the symbolic center of worship, and this movement can reinforce the idea that gifts are offered to God rather than extracted by the institution.

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[22] Ps 96:8-9; Rom 12:1. The paper uses ‘offering’ broadly to include tithes, alms, freewill gifts, and mission support given in the context of worship.

By contrast, when deacons or deaconesses move from person to person, the direction of movement changes. The church's representatives approach the worshiper. This can communicate hospitality and inclusion, especially for the elderly, disabled, visitors, parents with children, or large congregations where forward movement would be difficult. Yet it can also communicate pursuit. If the plate is extended directly toward each person, those without a gift may feel watched. The practice may unintentionally shift attention from God to the social exchange between collector and congregant.

The spatial question is therefore pastoral and theological. A central offering station may better express the worshiper's agency, while a passed plate may better include those who cannot move easily. A church should not simply ask which method raises more money. I should ask what the movement teaches about God, the giver, the poor, the officers of the church, and the gathered assembly.

Theme 3: Reverence Depends on Liturgical Flow

The third theme is that reverence depends on how the collection is placed within the whole order of worship. A method may be reverent in one setting and disruptive in another. Passing a plate during prayer, Scripture reading, or a solemn appeal may fragment attention. A forward offering during loud announcements may also weaken reverence. The offering should be framed by Scripture, prayer, song, or silence in ways that connect it to worship rather than to administrative necessity.

Liturgical theology helps here. Worship is a patterned response to God. It normally includes gathering, confession or praise, Word, response, table or commitment, and sending, though traditions order these elements differently. Offering fits most naturally as a response to God's Word and grace, not as a commercial pause. Cherry, Long, and Webber all emphasize that worship planning should connect actions to the gospel narrative rather than assemble unrelated items.[23] A collection method that is efficient but poorly placed may train the congregation to regard giving as an interruption; a method that is slower but carefully framed may deepen reverence.

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[23] Constance M. Cherry, The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 21-44.

Theme 4: Visibility Must Not Become Coercion

The fourth theme concerns dignity, voluntariness, and non-coercion. Jesus warned against giving in order to be seen by others, and Paul insisted that each giver should give willingly, not under compulsion.[24] This principle is directly relevant to collection styles. A forward procession can be meaningful, but it can embarrass those who have nothing to give. A passed plate can enable participation without movement, but it can pressure worshipers when the plate is placed in their hands. A fixed box or digital system can protect privacy, but it can also make the communal sign of offering less visible.

The widow's offering challenges churches at this point. Jesus noticed a poor woman's gift, but he did not exploit her poverty, announce her name, or pressure others by comparison. He interpreted the act to his disciples as a lesson in God's valuation. A collection style that creates shame for the poor contradicts the very narrative often used to support visible giving. The church must make room for those who give secretly, those who give electronically, those who give at another time, and those who cannot give money but offer service, prayer, and life to God.

Theme 5: Reverence Includes Accountability

The fifth theme is accountability. Reverence is not only a matter of quietness or beauty; it also includes trustworthiness. Temple repair funds were handled by appointed persons. Paul's collection for Jerusalem was accompanied by concern for approved messengers and honorable administration before God and people.[25] A central box without transparent counting can be just as problematic as a passed plate without safeguards. A beautiful offertory that lacks accountability damages worship because it undermines trust.

Modern churches must therefore consider security, counting procedures, receipt systems, designated purposes, and financial reporting. These concerns may partly explain why officers moved through congregations: the method allowed designated people to receive gifts in an orderly way. However, accountability should not

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[24] Matt 6:1-4; 2 Cor 9:7. These texts place giving under the disciplines of sincerity, secrecy where needed, and freedom from compulsion.

[25] 2 Cor 8:20-21. Paul’s concern that the collection be administered honorably before both God and people is relevant to secure and accountable collection methods.

erase the worshipful character of giving. The best practice will join reverence and transparency.

6. Discussion: How Did the Church Move Away from a Treasury Model?

The phrase 'move away' must be qualified. The church did not simply abandon a biblical method in one moment. Rather, offering practices developed through several overlapping transitions. First, the earliest Christians moved from temple-centered worship to gatherings shaped by the risen Christ, apostolic teaching, prayer, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and care for the needy. Giving remained central, but the Jerusalem temple treasury was no longer the institutional center of Christian offering.

Second, as Christian worship developed, gifts were often associated with the Eucharistic offering and care for the poor. People brought bread, wine, and material gifts; leaders distributed resources. This pattern retained a presentation logic. Third, when church buildings, fixed seating, parish systems, and larger congregations became common, churches needed orderly ways to receive gifts. Deacons, ushers, stewards, and churchwardens naturally became involved because their roles included service, order, charity, and administration. In some settings, bringing gifts forward remained normal; in others, the plate or bag moved through the assembly.

Fourth, Protestant traditions reshaped the offertory in different ways. Some retained a formal offertory; others minimized ceremonial actions they associated with medieval sacrificial theology. Yet churches still needed to support ministry and charity, so alms and offerings continued. The collection plate or bag became an efficient practice suited to pews and sermon-centered services. Fifth, modern technology and public health crises accelerated further change. The COVID-19 pandemic led many churches to suspend passing plates, use baskets or boxes, and encourage electronic giving.[26] These changes revived older questions: if the offering is an act of worship, how can it remain visible and reverent when no plate is passed?

[26] Colwell, *Co-Creating Virtual Community*.

Therefore, the church's movement from treasury to seated collection was not necessarily a deliberate rebellion against Scripture. It was a practical, architectural, liturgical, and administrative development. Nevertheless, inherited developments can become spiritually dull or theologically confused. Churches should be willing to reform offering practices when the method no longer communicates worship, gratitude, freedom, and reverence.

7. Implications for Contemporary Churches

The findings suggest that churches should evaluate offering practices by theological criteria rather than custom alone. A biblically faithful method should meet at least seven criteria. First, it should be God-directed, clearly framed as a response to God's grace. Second, it should be voluntary, avoiding pressure, embarrassment, or manipulation. Third, it should be reverent, placed within the service in a way that strengthens rather than interrupts worship. Fourth, it should be embodied, offering a visible sign of gratitude even for those who give electronically or at another time. Fifth, it should be inclusive, accommodating children, the elderly, visitors, people with disabilities, and those without money to give. Sixth, it should be accountable, with secure handling and transparent reporting. Seventh, it should be pedagogical, teaching the church that stewardship is discipleship.

Several practical models follow from these criteria. A church may use a central offering box or treasury near the front or entrance, but it should include a clear offertory prayer so that the act does not become invisible. A church may invite worshipers to come forward with offerings, but it should provide alternatives for those who cannot come or who give electronically. A church may pass plates or baskets, but collectors should move with dignity, avoid aggressive gestures, and allow worshipers to pass without shame. A church may use digital giving, but it should preserve a liturgical moment of dedication so that electronic gifts are still understood as worship. Some congregations may combine methods: a central box, an offertory procession for representatives, and discreet assistance for those who need it.

The phrase ‘finding people where they are’ can be interpreted positively or negatively. Positively, it reflects pastoral accommodation: the church makes participation possible for those who are seated, weak, disabled, new, or crowded into a large assembly. Negatively, it can feel like religious officers searching for money. The difference lies in framing, manner, and

congregational culture. Deacons and deaconesses should be trained not merely to collect funds but to serve a holy moment. Their posture, pace, dress, facial expression, and timing all communicate theology.

Church leaders should also distinguish between 'receiving' and 'taking' an offering. The language of 'taking a collection' can sound extractive; 'receiving the offering' or 'presenting our gifts to God' better expresses worship. Announcements should avoid phrases that imply payment for the service. The offertory should not be used to shame non-givers or visitors. If an appeal is necessary, it should be truthful, brief, and spiritually framed.

8. A Proposed Reverent Offering Model

For churches concerned that passing plates weakens reverence, the following model may provide a balanced alternative. After the sermon or before the prayers of dedication, the worship leader briefly says: 'Having heard God's Word and received God's grace, we now present our tithes and offerings as an act of worship. Those who have already given electronically, and those unable to give today, are invited to offer themselves to God in prayer.' A hymn, instrumental meditation, or silence follows. Worshipers may come forward to place gifts in a central basket or may use secure boxes placed visibly but discreetly. Deacons assist those who cannot move. Afterward, a representative brings the gifts forward or stands near the central receptacle while the congregation prays a prayer of dedication.

This model preserves several values. It returns agency to the worshiper, connects giving to response, protects those who cannot give, provides accommodation for those who cannot move, and maintains a visible liturgical moment. It is not the only faithful model, but it responds to the biblical imagery of bringing gifts while avoiding unnecessary compulsion or disorder.

9. Areas for Further Research

This study is limited by its method. A qualitative literature review can synthesize theological and historical themes, but it cannot measure congregational experience directly. The perceived reverence of a collection style may vary by denomination, culture,

architecture, class, age, and local teaching. In some African contexts, forward movement with song may be deeply reverent and communal. In some Western contexts, quiet boxes may be perceived as more dignified. In some Pentecostal or charismatic churches, public movement may express joy; in some liturgical churches, the same movement may feel disruptive. Therefore, local empirical research is needed.[27]

Future studies could interview pastors, deacons, treasurers, and congregants about their experience of offering practices. Comparative studies could examine offering styles across Anglican,

Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist congregations.

10. Conclusion

Does the method matter? Yes, but not in a simplistic way. Scripture does not command every church in every age to use only one collection method. The temple treasury, the widow's offering, the early Christian collection, Pauline stewardship, and later offertory practices all provide principles rather than a single universal mechanism. Yet methods matter because they form the worshiping imagination. A church's way of receiving offerings teaches what giving is.

The strongest biblical and theological principles are clear: giving should be directed to God, freely offered, proportionate to ability, protected from pride and coercion, accountable in administration, and connected to the needs of worship, mission, and the poor. A collection style that violates these principles should be reformed, even if it is traditional. A collection style that embodies these principles may be faithful even if it differs from another congregation's custom.

Churches that currently send deacons or deaconesses through seated congregations should ask whether the practice is serving reverence or merely preserving habit. Churches that invite people forward should ask whether the practice encourages devotion or exposes the poor. Churches that use boxes or digital giving should ask whether the offering remains visibly connected to worship. The

[27] Because this paper is a literature review, its conclusions are interpretive rather than statistically causal. Empirical congregational research is recommended for testing the perceived effects of different collection styles in particular cultural settings.

goal is not to win a debate over plates, boxes, or processions. The goal is to ensure that the church's offering practices help the people of God worship with reverence, gratitude, freedom, and integrity.