

Role of Pastoral Preaching in Curtailing Prevalence of Abortion Among Married Couples.

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ABSTRACT: Abortion remains a contentious ethical and moral issue, even more so when it involves married couples, a demographic often overlooked in abortion discourse. This paper examines the increasing trend of abortion among married women in Nigeria and explores the multifaceted reasons behind their decisions, including economic hardship, fetal abnormalities, child-spacing preferences, and personal aspirations. Drawing on theological principles and pastoral responsibilities, the paper emphasizes the critical role pastoral preaching can play in addressing this issue. Through moral guidance, spiritual nurturing, raising awareness of supportive resources, and compassionate counseling, pastoral preaching can serve as a redemptive and preventative tool. It advocates for an empathetic, scripture-based preaching model that upholds the sanctity of life while offering support and direction to couples navigating complex life circumstances. Ultimately, the study posits that pastoral preaching, when intentionally directed at the existential realities of the congregation, has the potential to reduce the prevalence of abortion among married couples.

Keywords: *Abortion, Spontaneous Abortion, Induced Abortion, Pregnancy, Fetus, Married Couple and Pastoral Preaching.*

INTRODUCTION

The topic of abortion has been a controversial and highly contentious ethical issue that evokes a wide range of perspectives across various religious and cultural contexts. Abortion means a pregnancy termination before the fetus is viable, or before the fetus is able to live independently in the extrauterine environment, usually before the 20th week of pregnancy. Abortion is often usually perceived as an issue that has to do with unmarried individuals and teenagers, however, today a considerable number of married couples procure abortion. Recent observation from clinical practice reports has shown an increasing trend of hospitalization of married women in Nigeria due to complications of induced abortion. Statistical report has revealed that married women constituted 30.2% of abortion seekers in Nigeria.

Based on the clinical practice reports and statistical report which reveals that married couples also procure abortion, this paper seek to attempt these questions amongst others: What would make married couples who consented together to have a baby later resolve on aborting a pregnancy? Is abortion the right option for married couples? These pertinent questions are often raised when considering the issues of abortion among married couples. Thus, this paper seeks to explore how pastoral preaching approach can help in curtailing abortion rate among married couples.

Concept of Abortion

According to World Health Organization (WHO), abortion is a term that refers to the termination of a pregnancy, whether it occurs with medical intervention such as medications or surgical procedures or whether it occurs on its own, such as miscarriage. An abortion that occurs without any form of intervention is referred to as “spontaneous abortion,” otherwise known as miscarriage. Research has revealed that this form of abortion (spontaneous) usually occur in approximately 30% to 40% of all pregnancies. On the other hand, an abortion that occurs as a result of medical intervention is known as “induced abortion.” This involves the use of medical procedure or medication to intentionally terminate a pregnancy.

Abortion among married couples in the context of this paper falls under the “induced” category. An intentionally act of pregnancy termination, whether carried

out by the woman alone or with the consent of the husband. Under the Nigerian law, according to Bankole, induced abortion is illegal, except when performed to save a woman's life. However, the law is still short of justice for the unborn because abortions are still carried out today without any restriction by the law.

Today, many religious conservatives have risen against the legalization of abortion. The Anti-abortion advocates (Pro-Life), believe that legalized abortion is a threat to social, moral, and religious values. While those who advocate abortion rights (Pro-Choice) generally believe that there should be a freedom of choice for women on abortion. By the first half of the 20th century, many countries had begun to liberalize abortions laws, at least to be performed to protect the woman's life and in some cases on the woman's request. The Soviet Union became the first modern state to liberalize abortion on request in 1920. Nigeria is not left out amongst the countries shifting ground to liberal abortion laws.

Reasons For Abortion Among Married Couples

There are diverse reasons for which some married couples will want to resolve for abortion today despite the law guiding the act. Some of the reason among many others shall be consider in this part of the paper.

Economic Factor is one of the reasons why some married couples resolve for abortion today. Couples facing financial difficulties may felt they do not have what it takes financially to raise the child. They already felt overextended with their current children and would be overwhelmed by having another. So, having another baby would adversely affect their other children quality of life. A married woman while defending her decision for procuring abortion explained that it was made to avoid the stress of having another child, which would further put a strain on the family's income amid the biting economic hardship.

Technological Advancement is another major reason while some couples opt for abortion in our contemporary time. Through ultrasound, a technology that helps to determine the sex of a fetus at sixteen weeks of pregnancy, couple can decide to go for abortion if the scan reveals an undesired sex. Furthermore, in a situation where

the fetus is discovered to have certain severed health defects, mental or physical, the parent might opt for abortion rather than having a baby with health challenges.

Child Spacing and Child Limiting is another reason for abortion among married couples. Sometimes couples agreed on certain number of years spacing for their children, in an event of what some couples will referred to as mistake in pregnancy, the next option might be abortion in order to maintain the child spacing. Again, at some other times when couples have had their agreed number of children, and there is an unexpected pregnancy, they opt for abortion.

Women's Rights, Autonomy and Determination, With The Slogan, "My body, My choice" has also been a reason for abortion among married couples procure. Some married women today procure abortion for some social reasons. Some at a particular time in their marriage sees pregnancy as a potential disruption for their educational pursuit or employment opportunities. Other women also feel that early motherhood will disfigure their natural shape and beauty. So they have a predetermined period for motherhood in their marriage. An emergence of any pregnancy before such period will leave them with no other portion than abortion. Sometimes, these women also have the support of their husband who also believed that some pregnancy symptoms have a way of disfiguring the natural shape and beauty of their wives. Other causes of abortion according to Nicholes include, rape, incest, emotions and mental health issue, life threatening risk. Having considered the reasons for abortion, a look at the concept of pastoral preaching will help in explaining its roles in curtailing it.

Concept of Pastoral Preaching

Pastoral Preaching is concerned with helping those who have come to Christ to grow spiritually. It assumes that the primary hearers are individuals who have personally repented of their sins and trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior. Randall Nichols describes it as when a preaching deliberately sets out to touch and involve people's personal concerns, whether on an immediate or a more global level. Kehinde Olusanya shares the same view with Nichols when he says Pastoral Preaching has to do with the existential needs of the congregation. It is about observing the needs of the Church and looking at their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs.

He summarizes it as offering pastoral care from the pulpit. Considering Nichols and Olusanya's description of Pastoral Preaching, this writer also sees Pastoral Preaching as giving special attention to the congregation's physical and spiritual well-being for spiritual maturity in Christ.

The core purpose of Pastoral Preaching, according to Mbewe is shepherding God's flock through God's word. According to him, the shepherd's primary work is to ensure the health and safety of the sheep because sheep are vulnerable to diseases, attacks, and tend to stray and get lost. With this assertion, Pastoral Preaching will involve guiding, tending, caring, and meeting the needs of the people. Showing them love and care, encouraging and guiding them through the word of God when they face life challenges and trials so that they will not deviate from faith and go astray due to the pressure of life.

The Bible in Ephesians 4:11-12 also emphasize the point that it is through Pastoral Preaching that the Church is to be shepherded. Charles Kemp also asserts that for preaching to be relevant, it must be contemporary and addressed to people who are living now in the real world and must deal with their personal and social needs. While the whole essence of preaching is to lead listeners to Christ for their salvation, addressing the needs and challenges of people in preaching, most especially in this dispensation is highly needful. People today are also looking forward to sermons that will address their immediate challenges, encourage them and lift their hope and trust in Christ ____ sermons which remind them of the ever-abiding presence and love of Christ.

The Role of Pastoral Preaching in Curtailing Abortion

There is no doubt that abortion is not only procured by unmarried ladies and teenagers, but it is prevalence today among married couples. Pastoral preaching can play a vital role in curtailing the prevalence abortion among married couples by addressing the issue through the following dimensions.

Moral guidance: Through moral guidance, Pastoral preaching can curtail the prevalence of abortion among married couples. Couples can be guided on Christian moral standard through emphasis on the sanctity of life, helping them to understand

that every child is a gift from God, and that the moral, spiritual soul is present at conception, and all human life is made in the image of God. Therefore, terminating the fetus is bringing to an abrupt end a life that God has predestined for a purpose. Though, some couples may feel justify sometimes for resolving on abortion based on some of the reasons enumerated above, this is where the role of pastoral preaching comes to play. Unlike the prophetic preaching that has to do with instant warning and severe judgment, pastoral preaching addresses the people's challenges with love, care and concern, not condemning them on the first instance, but calling their attention to the fact that God is against abortion, by taking them through relevant scriptural passages. Through this moral guidance, the couples can easily realize their wrong intended action and reverse their decision, or get broken for their action and seek the face of God for forgiveness.

Fostering Spiritual Growth: This is another way pastoral preaching method can help in curtailing abortion among married couples. Through pastoral preaching method, couples can be encouraged on the importance of faith and reliance on God during difficult times. By reminding them of the supernatural provision of God, couples who have resolved on abortion due to financial challenges can be assisted to grow spiritually in their knowledge of the love and care of God for them and their family. Through pastoral preaching approach of shepherding that has to do with ensuring the health and safety of the sheep from going astray and get lost, couples who have opted for abortion can end up throwing in the towel. Strengthening spiritual convictions can therefore help couples trust in God for their family needs and provision, thereby reducing the likelihood of abortion.

Raising Awareness: Through raising of awareness, pastoral preaching can provide alternative for couples who are planning to procure abortion. Many couples might feel isolated in their decision making process and may not be aware of resources available at their disposal. Pastoral preaching can raise awareness of support systems such as pregnancy resource centers, welfare centers, and local organizations that offer financial support to families facing unexpected pregnancies. Through this awareness, couples can be informed of such resources, which may result in keeping the pregnancy and saving the life of the unborn child.

Compassionate counseling: This is another way pastoral preaching can help in curtailing abortion among married couples. The pastor in the preaching of the sermon can advocates for counseling and therapeutic services that can help couples process their emotions and fears surrounding pregnancy. However, according to Asher, such Counseling should be supportive and nonjudgmental regardless of circumstances. With this, couples can be encouraged to seek help from trusted professionals who can provide sound advice and guidance, thus reducing the perceived need for abortion.

Emphasizing the Sanctity of Life: By emphasizing the sanctity of life. Pastoral preaching can be a means of curtailing abortion among married couples. This can be attain by preaching on the sacredness of life, emphasizing that every human being is created in the image of God, and teaching couples that life begins at conception and that God values each life, no matter how small. With this biblical insight and awareness, Couples who have resolved on abortion due to child spacing or birth limiting, can be enlightened to view pregnancy as a divine gift rather than a burden. Also, by emphasizing on the sanctity of life, couples who have resolved to procure abortion due to fetus health defect can have a change a mind, believing that God has a plan for all his creation and also have the power to heal all manners of ailment and diseases. However, in a situation where pregnancy is a threat to life, couples should seek the face of God in the place of prayers as they consider thoughtfully professional medical advice.

Pastoral preaching approach can no doubt play a vital role in curbing the prevalence of abortion among married couple today. Supporting this claim, Mark Campbell says, “When preaching on abortion; express genuine compassion for those affected, because “People don’t care what you know, until they know how much you care.” This exactly is what pastoral preaching is all about, guiding, tending, caring, and meeting the needs of the people, through the exposition of the word of God when they are face with life challenges and trials, so that they will not deviate from faith and go astray due to the pressure of life. These however are done without compromising God’s standard for holiness.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to look at the role of pastoral preaching in curtailing the prevalence of abortion among married couples. Having considered the concept of abortion, concept of pastoral preaching, reasons for abortion, and the role of pastoral preaching in curtailing abortion, the paper discovered that, pastoral preaching approach if adopted by preachers of the gospel can be a powerful tool in curtailing the issue of the prevalence of abortion among married couples. Pastoral preaching through moral guidance, fostering spiritual growth, raising awareness of support systems, compassionate counseling and emphasis on the sanctity of life, will assist couples who are planning to procure abortion have a second thought which will ultimately reduce the prevalence of abortion among couples.

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