

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE: ITS CHALLENGES TO

PASTORAL MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to look at what alternative medicine is and how it affects the pastoral ministry. The thrust of the work is the challenges that alternative medicine pose to pastors and their ministries. The first chapter is the introduction that has to do with the importance of the study and definition of key terms in the study. Chapter two, differences between alternative and scientific medicine, looks into the historical background of medicine, traditional, and scientific medicine. It points to the fact that scientific medicine is the conventional medicine and any kind of medicine apart from this is alternative medicine.

Chapter three, ethical and professional implications bring out the non-Christian, biblical, and Christian views about alternative medicine. It is discovered that alternative therapists point to some biblical passages as their basis. Likewise Christians view alternative medicine differently. The fourth chapter, challenges to pastoral ministry, is the core of the paper which looks into how cultural beliefs, Church members, and medical practitioners pose challenges to pastors via alternative medicine. It also looks into the spiritual implications of being involved in alternative therapy. The concluding chapter is the fifth one, which also states the recommendations e. g Pastors should endeavour to research and know more about different types of alternative therapy.

CONCLUSION

The alternative medicine in discussion has been looked at and one could see its implications for the pastoral ministry. It is no gainsaying that every pastor at one time or the other in his ministry will face the challenges of alternative medicine. This is because the use of alternative medicine is spreading wide at this time as people seem to be dissatisfied with conventional medical practices. Reasons for this way have to do with belief system, high cost, and poverty. It has been pointed out in this research that people are flocking to alternative medicine because it seems to offer hope where conventional medicine has failed. This is especially in the cases of illnesses that are believed to be spiritually related, diabetes, kidney and liver problems, stroke, etc.

Some of the therapist believed that their therapies are biblically based as pointed out in Chapter three of this research. Some Christians see nothing bad in alternative medicine while others see it as sinful. In the real sense of it, not all alternative therapies are bad or sinful but the problem is how to know the right one. Any therapy that involves satanic practices; incantation, dedication to gods, magic and so on is not good and Christians should avoid it. I stay close with the stance of the Nigerian Baptist Convention on traditional medicine for pastoral ethics which says

“while there could be genuine and honest use of traditional herbal medicine devoid of evil influence. it is their view that it is difficult to distinguish between their use and the involvement of occult and demonic elements. Thus, in order to avoid creating confusion, doubt, suspicion and above all, bringing the name of Christ to

disrepute, no Nigerian Baptist Pastor should be involved with such practices.¹

The name of Christ in the life of a pastor is important, hence the need for pastors to stay clear from alternative medicine.

Many are the challenges of alternative medicine to pastoral ministry as noted earlier on. The medical practitioners, cultural beliefs, Church members are all posing the challenges. Pastors are therefore to be more prayerful and be well-read and grounded in the word of God. Intercession for Church members should therefore be taken serious by pastors in their ministries. Pastors in particular should put into consideration the ethical implications of their involvement in alternative therapy. The pastoral and Christian ethics of many go against the act of going beyond the boundary of the profession. They hold in high esteem their profession and discipline of the erring members. Pastors should also know that the ethics of their profession matter a lot to their ministry and lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the implications of alternative medicine on pastoral ministry and Christian life, the following are the recommendations for both Christians and pastors.

In as much as there is no clear demarcation between therapy with evil influence, a Christian should consider first under which category it falls before deciding to use alternative medicine. Christians should avoid therapies that fall under the life energy and fraud categories. These assume life energy called "Chi" or "Prana" that can be manipulated using a variety of techniques.²

¹ Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, 22 .

² Zukeran, Probe Navigation.

Scientifically unproven and questionable therapy must be studied and decisions made in a case-by-case basis. Reason being that many of the proofs for alternative medicine are based on controversial interpretations of scientific theories or testimonies of users.

An individual trying to take alternative medicine should consult a physician and pharmacist. This is because an alternative therapist may prescribe approaches contrary to one's doctor's recommendation, or give one medicine that may react negatively with the prescribed medications.

Christians should avoid therapists who expound life energy therapy because their ideas are built on a pantheistic worldview, causing these therapies to embrace or at least acknowledge Eastern mysticism.³

Although there is no biblical admonition forbidding the use of herbal products, Christians should approach the herbal market from an informed perspective.

You are responsible for your health and treatment, therefore the need for knowledge is a necessity when deciding to integrate different methods of treatment for the health care provider involved.

Pastors should endeavour to research and know more about different types of alternative therapy.

Pastors should teach their members about the pros and cons of alternative medicine and how to play safe in it.

For professional and ethical integrity, pastors should stay away from being alternative therapist of any kind.

During counseling or visit to the sick, pastors should try to find out about the involvement of the person or persons in alternative medicine.

³ Ibid.

Pastors should not be ignorant of devices of the devil. If it is found out that a member has ignorantly or knowingly partook of alternative therapy that is magical in operation, A deliverance session should be conducted for him to destroy the works of the devil.