

Christianity and tobacco use

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As a man of the church, I believe that smoking is contrary to the original form of man's creation. When God created man, He made him in the highest degree of purity and glory.

According to the Scriptures, "God did not create thorns and bristles until Adam committed his sin and after his fall". We realize that Satan, the enemy of all goodness, tries to spread evil in our world. Smoking and other problems we face in life are part of that evil.

May I begin by saying that Christianity does not forbid matter, but does forbid that matter should be used for the wrong purposes. Certain drugs and wines may be used medicinally, as anaesthetics and surgeons are aware. But it is drug abuse that destroys the mind in order to give man a distorted image that differs greatly from the image of his creation.

Hence, when we face things that destroy man's health and ruin his well-being and stability, such as tobacco, we remember the teachings of the Bible that make clear that while "all things are lawful, not all things are constructive".

Hence, when we say that everything is lawful, it is important to remember our duty not to allow anything to hold us in slavery. Since smoking is an addiction, it certainly enslaves the smoker. The Bible states: "Whoever perpetrates a sin is a slave of that sin".

Today we see how smoking holds every smoker in slavery, whether a young person, a man or a woman, youth or adult. This is clear in the fact that every smoker finds it very hard to quit.

A smoker may ruin his spiritual life and lose his relationship with God as a result of smoking. He may not be able to pray or fast or maintain a good relationship with his Lord because of smoking. The clearest example is fasting.

A person who is addicted to smoking is unable to give it up in order to fast. He says: "Fasting is very difficult. How can I fast when I have to have a cigarette with my morning coffee. I cannot get through the day unless I have a cigarette. I cannot even lift my head without it".

That is the reason why we look at smoking as enslavement, because the perpetrator of sin is a slave of that sin. The same applies to adultery, alcohol and drugs. All are types of enslavement. Used properly, however, such substances may be acceptable, in the same way as we use anaesthetics in medicine.

Another point is that one's faith must be clear and free of ambiguity. Faith presents man's action in a way that glorifies God. In the Scriptures we read: "When people see your good actions, they glorify your Father in heaven".

Undoubtedly when a human being resorts to doing what is improper, or doing something that degrades him in front of others, he actually gives a wrong notion of God, his faith and of what God does with his life. As such he is not honest.

The Bible teaches us that honesty must remain man's guide throughout his life. It says: "Be honest until your death and I will give you the crown of life". This clearly shows that man is placed in a position of trust with regard to his body, health, property and family.

A priest is also responsible for the people in his community. This requires that honesty and faithfulness to our trust must be seen in life. We must, then, combat all bad habits so that we may be known by our dutiful and pure actions to show God's beautiful work.

Honesty in human life is not limited to property and health. It also includes the spiritual aspect and rituals of worship such as prayer and fasting. It is further concerned with man's relationship with God, and his love of other human beings, and every good action. That is why we do not stand in anyone's way to prevent him from receiving what is good. On the contrary, we help people to do good works.

Smoking leads to many sinful actions, because smoking may have adverse effects on the smoker's soul, exposing him to problems and difficulties. Indeed a man may leave God's house feeling the urge to smoke, as though his cigarette is more important to him than what God says and does. That shows that we have a great mission to fulfill.

We are placed in a position whereby people emulate us. This includes all of us here, whether we are priests, doctors or Islamic scholars. The task we have to undertake in our community is highly important. This is particularly true of religious leaders.

In our country, an important feature is the fact that both Christians and Muslims have great respect for priests and scholars, and respect their counsel. People know that whatever religious leaders say is meant to serve their interests. As priests, we frequently try to make people understand that it is imperative to quit smoking because it enslaves the smoker.

In the Book of Parables, the Bible says: "A person who has eaten his fill will not be tempted by honey". A person who is tempted by tobacco, drugs, adultery or drinks is a weary person defeated by Satan and by sin.

Hence, we must be ready with our help to try to save him from evil and transform him to one who is self-sufficient. Our children must realize that we want them to be self-sufficient to show them the way to faith and good works. That would help them to

abandon the way of sin and evil so that they may lead a life of purity, holiness and love of God and man. Thus they will grow in goodness.

One problem that encourages smoking and causes young people to turn to it is unemployment. Young people who frequent cafés that are available everywhere suffer from having nothing to do with their time. A young man may start to go to a café as a non-smoker, but he leaves it a smoker. This shows the need to help our youth to use their time in a gainful way, so that they may be engaged in work, useful hobbies, sport, noble concepts, serious reading, particularly religious books.

We need to teach them how to appreciate God's blessings which He has bestowed on all of us. A mind with nothing to occupy it is a playing field for Satan. When Satan finds a person with nothing to occupy his mind, he hurries to seduce him and thus he lands him with great troubles.

Finally I would like to stress the need to continue our hard work in combating smoking and all forms of tobacco use. We must remember, however, that the task we face is a hard one which requires great perseverance. We must never lose hope. On the contrary, we must continue our struggle against all social ills, in order that our society, and human society in general, is based on goodness, peace and love.