THE HARMFULNESS OF ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO SMOKING IN CARDIOVASCULAR PATHOLOGY AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL THERAPY

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THE HARMFULNESS OF ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO SMOKING IN CARDIOVASCULAR PATHOLOGY AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPIRITUAL THERAPY (Abstract): A holistic approach to the human person, from a somatic, psychological and spiritual point of view, with reference to the harmfulness of alcoholism and smoking in cardiovascular pathology, highlights several therapeutic variants over time. Among them are: the current somatic therapy, which could not offer optimal solution in eradicating this vice, and psychiatry which, using will power, could not solve man’s contradiction with himself, caused by a tempting and treacherous irrationality of senses, instinctive-affective desires, turned into vices, as a “Quasi altera natura”, devoid of any bright and creative horizon. As such we propose an alternative that entails changing one’s lifestyle to eliminate the harmful effect of alcoholism and smoking on cardiovascular pathology, through the perspective of spiritual therapy, accessible to contemporary society, at no cost and with no adverse events. **Keywords:** SPIRITUAL THERAPY, ALCOHOLISM, TOBACCO ADDICTION.

**Tobacco smoking** is a major risk factor for coronary, carotid and peripheral atherosclerotic disease; passive smoking also shows an increase in cardiovascular risk. The impact of smoking on metabolism consists of increased total cholesterol and decreased HDL cholesterol in platelet and leukocyte activation, increased circulating fibrinogen, endothelial dysfunction with the promotion of fissure in vulnerable plates, increased heart rate and blood pressure, as well as other effects aggravating myocardial ischemia due to inhaled carbon monoxide (1,2).

Smoking, together with increased blood pressure, is a strong cardiovascular risk factor; it causes cardiovascular events: stroke, myocardial infarction and peripheral vascular disease. The most effective measure to prevent cardiovascular disease is smoking cessation and lifestyle changes. In particular cases, nicotine replacement therapy might be considered. A detailed research on 36 studies comparing long-term smoking cessation rate using bupropion showed a relative success of 1.69% on control; whereas the combination of nicotine replacement therapy with varenicline yielded no results. Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning regarding the safety profile of varenicline, in the sense that spreading smoke substances in the blood, across respiratory surfaces, acts on the nervous system, caus-
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Alcohol is regarded as the fourth risk of health problem after cardiovascular diseases. Alcohol is the most common risk factor in the occurrence and evolution of cardiovascular risk. The excessive long-term alcohol consumption increases hypertensive risk and, in parallel, the risk of strokes, or causes supra-arachnoid hemorrhage.

Physiologically speaking, alcohol passes entirely in the blood at the level of digestive surfaces; it creates irritation and necrosis in the mucous membranes, and eventually cirrhosis of the liver. Influencing the circulatory system, alcoholism creates and aggravates, like smoking, myocardial infarction, arteritis, as well as other metabolic disorders. On the nervous system it creates disturbances in reflexes, manifested paradoxically.

The alcohol can be eliminated, like smoking, through one’s own will, by becoming aware of the danger it poses on health and wishing to have a healthy life, while also considering the resources wasted to the detriment of well-being. In the following lines we will attempt to present an alternative to eliminate the harmfulness of alcoholism and smoking, through the perspective of spiritual therapy (6, 7, 8).

Spiritual therapy. In principle, any desire that is inconsistent with human nature, as well as excesses of any kind, have been regarded since the oldest times as vices or enslaving passions, owing to their insatiability. In particulars, stoics believed that vices, which they called "κακία" were diseases of the soul, was mainly aimed at the spiritual part of the human person, and especially the rational factor, thought of as the divine in man. This integral, holistic, psychosomatic view, applied to ancient medical practice, becomes increasingly more topical in our times, when stress and anxiety help proliferate diseases barely heard of in the past, such as diabetes, arterial hypertension, coronary heart disease, tumors, or strokes; and smoking, drug use and alcoholism keep claiming more victims, including depression, which is triggered by specific energetic imbalance, all sorts of somatic pathologies (9, 10, 11, 12).

To reference ancient thought again, we will say that, having the main concern of continuously developing and perfecting psychosomatic human nature, it was believed that any natural thing is not bad in and of itself, but becomes bad through its defective or unnatural use, due mostly to excess (13,14). Suggestive in this sense are the words of Apuleius of Madaurus, who established that “The first cup is for thirst, the second for mirth, the third for delight,
the fourth for madness” (15). Hence, the need to apply moderation, after good rational counsel; defining the health of human nature itself by avoiding the two extremes that are harmful to it, i.e. lack or insufficiency, which does not satisfy necessity; and excess or abuse, which exceeds necessity. Resulting from the insatiability of lusts, alcoholism, along with other vices, generates all kind of suffering, both to the soul, by dominating it and canceling its authentic freedom of expression, and to the body, through all sorts of diseases, which ruin its health, bringing suffering, degradation and death. This is why, in order to foster health, as a normal and necessary way to develop and perfect integral (psychosomatic) human nature, education is promoted in the culture of all peoples across the world, that is, as a culture of the spirit, as shaping or polishing human personality according to principles intended to bring its accomplishment or perfection.

Nature comprises native predispositions, flaws and qualities, most often passed from parent to child. Reason, referring to learning, comprises instruction made based on arguments, to create a certain mentality likely to cultivate qualities and eliminate flaws contained in each person’s nature. Habits mean practicing what was learned to create a stable attitude. Thus, habit can become a second nature (quasi: altera natura), when set free from the strict rule of heredity, becoming the result of environment or the imitation of new forms, freely and consciously accepted by man (15).

However, delving deeper into these three factors, essential differences were noted, both in their structure, and in their functionality. Thus, as Plato said, there are people with a nature of gold, willing to receive and cultivate fundamental values, summarized in: truth, goodness and beauty; but there are also coarse, difficult natures in the path towards the rational order of life. Reason can, in its turn, be fair, but most of the times it lacks the lucidity of a correct decision. Habits depend on the power of will, which fulfill an essential role in transforming rational decision into constant action. This leads to a contradiction between man and himself, i.e. a contradiction between vulgar pleasures, turned into habits, as blind necessities, which shut and unravel the bright horizon of life, and the light of reason or judgment of conscience, oriented towards real values intended to fulfill the aspirations of human nature, through health and authentic assertion. Thus, ancient scholars were right to deplore failure, saying: video meliora proboque, sed deteriora sequor (I see and approve of the better, but I follow the worse – Ovid, Metamorphoses, VII – 20, 21); and later, Paul the Apostle stated “For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do” (Romans 7, 15-19). And if this contradiction exists, it only means that human nature is suffering, as simple education as therapy of the soul, meant to find the optimal solution in its quest for accomplishment or perfection, cannot achieve everything, being most of the times destined for failure (15).

We can see that spiritual therapy as a work of divine grace brings forth in the soul the power of faith able to convert, to change mentalities and feelings, guiding them towards a new behavior. A concrete model in this context is given by Saint Paul the Apostle who said, referring to his own conversion: “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of
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Christ ... for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3, 7-8). Given that excessive alcoholic drink also generates disturbances in conscience by inciting other vices, it opposes the cultivation of spiritual life, for which reason, one must nurture self-control, according to the apostolic urge, as a virtue of moderation and as a norm of Christian life: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5, 18). This apostolic urge has become the golden rule of Christian behavior, as it was constituted as a holy tradition originating in the words of the Lord: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.” (Luke 21, 34). On these grounds, Clement of Alexandria laid down in writing the appropriate manner in which Christians should use wine, as a drink of moderation: “It is proper, therefore, that boys and girls should keep as much as possible away from this medicine. For it is not right to pour into the burning season of life the hottest of all liquids—wine—adding, as it were, fire to fire. For hence wild impulses and burning lusts and fiery habits are kindled [...] I however think that then especially ought reason to be introduced to mix in the feast, to act the part of director (pedagogue) to wine-drinking[...] Drink not wine to drunkenness [...] For the gurgling occasioned by the drink rushing with violence[...], is a shameful and unseemly spectacle of intemperance [...]. The Scythians, the Celts, the Iberians, and the Thracians, all of them warlike races, are greatly addicted to intoxication, and think that it is an honorable, happy pursuit to engage in. But we, the people of peace, feasting for lawful enjoyment, not to wantonness, drink sober cups of friendship that our friendships may be shown in a way truly appropriate to the name.” (Pedagogues, Book II, Chapter II, 19,2; 20,3; 25,1; 31,1) (15).

A concrete example of application of spiritual therapy, especially with regard to alcoholism, tobacco addiction and other lusts, is apparent in the action specially organized by the Transylvanian Church, after the First World War, through the work of the missionary priest Iosif Trifa, founder of the “Army of the Lord”, as movement of spiritual awakening from the death of lusts. In the “Foreword” to his books, suggestively entitled according to the model of Christian hermits “Alcohol – a spirit of the devil”, Sibiu, 1936, the following are said: “This book is the fruit of work and concern lasting for 14 years. Around 1921, I started a movement to combat alcoholism in our people. This is a plague others have dealt with. However, unlike others, we started the fight in the name of the Lord and with the power of the Lord. We dragged our enemy alcohol where he alone cannot win: on the battlefield of the Gospel. We laid the foundations of the Great Crusade of religion against alcohol – the ‘Army of the Lord’ movement – and we harvested unexpected victories. The Army of the Lord now counts more than 100,000 fighters and marches victorious across the entire country. Once again it was proven that alcoholism, tobacco addiction and other lusts cannot be fought with advice and conference, but only with the power of the Gospel [...] Tens of thousands of souls were delivered by this movement from the chains of devil – alcohol” (15). Of course, faced with this success in applying spiritual therapy to combat the harmfulness of alcoholism and
smoking, we should not display an exclusivist triumph, but in reaching a common goal we ought to make a synergy of all alternatives that have proved to be efficient. Paul the Apostle urged us to this sort of sound counsel, when he said: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5, 21) (15).

CONCLUSIONS

The tobacco smoking has an important etiologic role in cardiovascular diseases (myocardial infarct, sudden death, peripheral vasculopathies, and stroke) and pulmonary diseases (pulmonary emphysema, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer). The most dangerous factor is tobacco smoking in young age, between 20-25 years, with important medical and social consequences.

Alcoholism is defined as the alcohol dependence, characterized by a high desire to drink, the loss of control (the impossibility to stop the alcohol ingestion, despite the desire to do it), the physical dependence, with a specific clinical symptomatology and the alteration of alcohol tolerance.

The alcohol consumption, associated with familial or professional stress can represent a risk factor for cardiovascular diseases. The active association between tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption leads to the increase of cardiovascular diseases incidence, especially in a high consumption, comparatively with reasonable and medium intake.

The chronic excessive alcohol consumption is frequently associated with other cardiovascular risk factors: tobacco smoking, excessive salt and coffee consumption, hyperglycemic and hyperlipidic diet, sedentary, unhealthy lifestyle, in a familial or professional important stress.

REFERENCES

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**THE INTERFERON-GAMMA RELEASE ASSAYS IN DIAGNOSIS OF TUBERCULOUS MENINGITIS**

Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) occurs most often in children and is the most severe form of extra pulmonary tuberculosis with a high rate of mortality in developing countries. The diagnosis of this infection is difficult because the microscopic exam has a poor sensibility and isolation of mycobacteria in culture is time consuming. The interferon-gamma (IFN-γ) release assays are new rapid methods for the diagnosis of tuberculosis. This technic detects the level of IFN-γ produced in response to the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* antigens using an immune enzymatic method. A recent study has evaluated usefulness of interferon-gamma combined detection in peripheral blood and cerebrospinal fluid in TBM diagnosis. The study included a group of 30 suspected cases of TBM and a control group of 39 cases of meningitis with another etiology. The detection of IFN-γ in peripheral blood and cerebrospinal fluid was realized by enzyme-linked immuno spot (ELISPOT) and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA), respectively. The results show that detection of IFN-γ in peripheral blood by ELISPOT had 70% sensitivity and 87% specificity in the diagnosis of TBM. ELISA for detection of IFN-γ in cerebrospinal fluid proved 83% sensitivity and 85% specificity. Also, after 4 weeks of treatment with anti-tuberculosis antibiotics, ELISA had detected a significant decrease of level of IFN-γ in patients with TBM. When the 2 methods showed positive results, the specificity for TBM diagnosis reached 100%. These findings support the usefulness of IFN-γ release assays in the diagnosis of TBM (Diya Lu, Cheng Chen, Shenglei Yu, Shu Chen. Diagnosis of Tuberculous Meningitis Using a Combination of Peripheral Blood T-SPOT.TB and Cerebrospinal Fluid Interferon-c Detection Methods. Lab Med. 2016;47(1):6-12).

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