**THE ATTITUDE OF CHRISTIANITY**

**TOWARDS WINE**

**From the Book of: MANY YEARS WITH PEOPLE’S QUESTIONS PART III, SPIRITUAL AND GENERAL QUESTIONS, By H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III**

**What is the doctrine of Christianity regarding wine? Is it allowed or forbidden? Or when is it allowed or forbidden?**

**Answer:**

In answering this question, I would like to put before you three

points which are:

1. Christianity does not prohibit the substance as a substance, but rather prohibits the abuse of the substance.

2. Orthodox Christianity distinguishes between wine and intoxicating liquor or spirits and bans the latter.

3. There are situations when Christianity does condemn wine. Let us take the first point:

**1. Christianity does not ban the substance:**

The substance in itself is not forbidden, otherwise God would not have created it. But to what extent should we apply this rule to wine.

**The most dangerous thing about wine is its alcoholic content, and Christianity does not ban alcohol as a substance.**

Alcohol is used in medicine, in cleaning materials, in perfumes, and is put into the constituents of many medicines, besides having other beneficial uses. Therefore, it is not prohibited in

itself, and we cannot ban it. But when alcohol is abused it is prohibited.

**The ban is on the misuse of the substance and not on the substance itself.**

Let us take drugs as an example:

We forbid their abuse, because drugs ruin a person's life, health, and dignity, and wastes his money, and drives him to commit crime. Drugs, as substances, though, are not banned in

themselves, for they are needed to anaesthetize during surgical operations; but this is to use the properties of drugs for a good purpose, in a healthy way, and one that doesn't lead to

addiction. In fact, used in this way, the drug enters the subconscious, far away from the will, or desire, or yearnings of the patient whom the doctor is anaesthetizing.

**Even poisons are not 'bad' in themselves as some are used medicinally as part of treatment.**

According to one of our poets:

"One poison can be antidote for another, and what might otherwise poison, may well cure the incurable."

From this starting point, and according to this reasoning, we can go on to talk about wine: we do not prohibit wine in itself as a substance, but only its abuse, as I have said above, I shall now go on to explain exactly what this abuse is.

**Wine was used in the past in treating illness before the science of pharmacy developed.**

We notice this in the story of the Good Samaritan *(Luke 10:34),* and in the advice given by Paul to his disciple Timothy, when hesaid: *" No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your*

*stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. (1 Tim. 5:23).* And some elderly people whose bodies had lost a lot of theirnatural warmth, used to be given a little wine - as part of a cure

- to help restore the warmth that their bodies required.

In a similar way, people in certain countries which are bitterly cold, take some wine to keep themselves warm, which is the opposite to our hot country, where many people's bodies are badly affected by the excessive heat.

**2. Wine and intoxicants:**

**The Holy Bible draws a clear distinction between wine and intoxicating spirits.**

Among the many verses which show this, I could mention:

1. *"Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. " (Lev. 10:9)*

2. And he said to the mother of that giant, Samson, when she was carrying him: *" Now therefore, please be careful not to* *drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything* *unclean." (Judg. 13:4).* And he also said to her husband, Samson's father: *"Your wife... may not eat anything that*

*comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."(Judg. 13:14).*

**3. And it was said of John the Baptist: *"He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. " (Luke 1:15).*** Thus, in each case there was a clear distinction between wineand stronger forms of drink. But what is the basic difference between them? And how canwe distinguish between them?

**The essential difference is the amount of alcohol that each contains, and by this we can distinguish between two types of wine: that produced by fermentation, and that produced**

**by distillation.**

Wine that is produced by natural fermentation may contain no more than 5 or 6% alcohol, and this is what we use in Church during the Eucharist, and it comes under the heading of 'wine'. We mean by this the kind of wine, which is not intoxicating, and the person only takes a very few drops from it, a part of a small spoonful mixed with water during the service. Liquor or spirits prepared by distillation, however, may contain sometimes as much as 50% alcohol, or thereabouts. It is 'this which comes under the heading of 'intoxicating drinks', and we prohibit them because the Bible does so, as I have shown above.

**3. The Abuse of Wine:**

This is something forbidden, and here are some cases and examples of such wrong use:

a) If it is harmful to a person's health and strength of mind and personality.

b) If it leads to drunkenness, or loss of physical control, to bad behavior, or into areas of immorality.

c) If it is addictive, making a person drink more and more until it becomes a habit difficult to break, or an addiction, which dominates him, so that he reaches a stage where he drinks for no reason and without needing to.

d) If it leads to harmful social consequences and frequently it does.

e) When it constitutes a stumbling block to others. *(Rom. 14:12)*

f) If one uses it on holy occasions, or in holy places (apart from in the Eucharist of course) and then comes to serve God, having drunk alcohol. The Holy Bible forbids drinking wine for all the

reasons mentioned above. There are world-wide Christian associations for the prohibition of intoxicants.

**One of the reasons for banning these intoxicants is because of the harm which they can do to a person's health.**

The Bible says: *"Do not not mix with winebibbers.. for drunkards. become poor. " (Prov. 23:20)*

**And regarding their prohibition on account of their power to cause drunkenness and physical instability and lead to depravity. The apostle Paul says:** *"Do not be drunk with wine, in which is**dissipation. " (Eph. 5:18).* Here Paul mentions two harmfulconsequences of drinking alcohol: drunkenness and debauchery.The Bible also says: *"Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a*

*brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." (Prov. 20:1)*

A distinction is made here between wine and beer. The phrase 'whoever is led astray by them', however, means someone who drinks too much to remain sober, for even though the degree of

alcohol in the particular wine or alcoholic drink might not be very great, it obviously mounts up when a large quantity is consumed, which would then lead to drunkenness. The Bible condemns anyone who makes his friend drunk with too much alcohol. *(Hab. 2:15)*

**The Bible forbids drunkards from entering the kingdom of heaven *(1 Cor. 6:10) and* forbids any association with drunkards. *(1 Cor. 5:11)* When it comes to banning wine for its harmful effects, the Bible says:** *" Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has**contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without**cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the**wine, those who go in search of mixed wine." (Prov. 23:29-30)*

**Here we see how the Bible heaps doom and destruction on those who are addicted to wine.**

The Bible says also: *" Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly; At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper. "*

*(Prov. 23:31-32)* And about the harm caused by wine it says: *"Wine [is] a mocker, Strong drink [is] a brawler" (Prov. 20:1)*

**There are many other verses concerning the prevention of addiction and over-indulgence, such as what Peter says about those who follow the road to evil:**

*"You have spent enough time in the past. living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness..." (1 Pet. 4:3)* (See also 1 Tim. 3:8, Titus 1:7and 2:3).

**And concerning the banning of wine on holy occasions:**

The Lord said to Aaron: *" Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. " (Lev. 10:9)* The Bible also

says: *"No priest is to drink wine when he enters the inner court." (Ezek. 44:22)*

The prophet Daniel speaking about his period of fasting said: " *I ate no pleasant food; no meat or wine came into my mouth " (Dan. 10:3).* And it says that when Daniel was in

Nebuchadnezzar's Palace he: *" would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies " (Dan. 1:8)*

**It was forbidden for a Nazirite to drink wine. In fact, he wasn't even allowed to drink grape juice. *(Num. 6:3)* Kings also were not allowed to drink wine.**

The Bible says regarding this: *" It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine,*

*Nor for princes intoxicating drink;" (Prov. 31:4).*