



"Wine, culture, spirituality and tourism in Portugal"

Discurso de S.A.R. o Duque de Bragança

"Internacional Wine Tourism Conference 2011"

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I was very kindly invited to speak before this group of notable and most competent wine specialists. I am flattered.

However, In the presence of people who know so much more than I, what can I say?

As a person who appreciates good wines, I will give you some arguments to justify those, who, like myself, may feel some guilt about it.

There are not a few respected religions and churches that condemn its consumption. But what would be God's opinion?

Since I could not consult my Creator, I sought an opinion of some of his servants who are specialists in this matter.

For Catholics, we start with a text written by Pope Benedict VI...

Joy and Wine

"Next to the miracle of the wine, we find, in the Gospel, the miracle of the bread by which Our Lord, with five loaves, fed thousands of persons with so many loaves being left over that there were twelve baskets left full of bread. (...)

If bread is a symbol of what man needs, wine on the other hand is the symbol of the superabundance of which we also have necessity.

It is a sign of joy, of the transfiguration of creation. It removes us from the day to day sadness and exhaustion and makes us come together in a feast. It broadens the senses and the soul, loosens the tongue and opens the heart; it transcends the barriers that limit our existence (...)

In this manner, wine became the symbol of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. [Abundance is] a sign of God in His creation: He creates the Universe in such a staggering magnitude in order to give in abundance to man. He gives life an incomprehensible abundance. It is in the Redemption, that he himself becomes the prodigy, becoming man, penetrating all of the poverty and limits of the human being."

In fact, what could the representative of Christ on Earth say when according to the Gospels, the first miracle of Jesus was to transform water into wine...

There are also other references to wine in the Gospels.

The Church consecrated as Patron of wine producers and Protector of crops: Saint Martin who naturally had to be a Frenchman, and in this way he became a Saint of great devotion. He is the Patron of innumerable Churches and Chapels the world over.

We know that in the time of the Romans wine was so appreciated that the feasts of the arrival of wine was one of the most contagious moments of joy where the god Bacchus was adored, and the bacchantes, women that adored Bacchus, delighted men with elaborate and tantalizing pleasures.

These feasts took place on the 25th of April and lasted for several days.

These feasts were so popular that the Roman Senate had to intervene in such a decisive manner that they were prohibited altogether. But much like today, the forbidden fruit is the most sought after, and so the feasts continued in ancient Rome

The Greeks also celebrated wine and numerous philosophers praised it.

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine said: "Wine is a substantial marvelous drink, most appropriate for man in health and in sickness if administered in just measure, according to the constitution of each person."

Plato said: "Wine is the greatest gift that God gave man. It is a medicine that rejuvenates the old, cures the sick, and enriches the poor."

Cicero said: "Wines are like men: the sour and the sweet mature over time."

Seneca affirmed: "Wine washes our iniquities, dries the soul to its depths and cures sadness".

A Latin proverb affirms that "Life gives Love but Wine gives good humor".

But also in the modern age there have been many writers, philosophers and scientists that have referred to this subject.

The great Pasteur affirmed: “More Philosophy exists in a bottle of wine than in all of the books” and also that “Wine may be considered as the most hygienic of drinks,” and he clearly understood microorganisms...

Napoleon Bonaparte said: “No wine, No soldiers” and regarding champagne he said: “It is deserved in victories and necessary in defeats.”

In Portugal, as in all of Europe, wine is profoundly connected to culture and to landscape. Curiously, the fact that it is not a necessary agricultural production, contrasts with its great importance in the history of many European regions.

There is developing an ever growing tourism specifically connected to wine, the most interesting example of this being the magnificent Douro valley, classified as Heritage landscape of humanity.

Personally, there are some aspects with which I disagree regarding the current proliferation of names and brands of wines that make it difficult, even for the Portuguese, more less foreigners to know which the better Portuguese wines are.

But it is a problem that will be probably resolved when a part of the producers associate themselves in their respective regions, just like the small producers have done in their cooperatives.

Some of the best Portuguese wines are produced in these cooperatives and one of these most recent wines to have been classified is the “Medieval Wine”, still made exclusively by small local producers in Ourém County, much as it was first introduced in the region, around 1445, by Dom Afonso, fourth Count of Ourém, first born son of the first Duke of Bragança.

It is possible today to make good wines in many regions of the World, but it is also true that a good wine needs a story and a good cradle to nurture it.

For this reason it is important to defend wine production regions and the preservation of its authenticity, as well as the exploration of its overall benefits in a World that is becoming ever more globalized and where we do not want a mechanized product but rather an artistic, cultural process that takes us back to a place that tells us something of greater importance.

Wine therefore has two important factors in the development of Portugal and of Europe. On one hand it represents the means of livelihood of small and medium size family economies, but on the other hand it can be an important element in the development of tourism.

It is fundamental that Portugal continue to preserve its national grape casts. But also indispensable is the preservation of the humanized landscape of the wine production regions, including the preservation of the regional architecture that has been so badly treated in these present times.

An indispensable ally of wine is food and the knowledge of some of the culinary rules associated with wine is therefore essential.

All of these considerations show that this product has a fundamental role in the culture of the peoples, at least of Europe which is the natural cradle of wine.

It makes perfect sense therefore that, much like today, we gather together to study these matters and find solutions to our common problems.

I leave you with my sincere wishes for the greatest success of this Conference, thanking you for having chosen our country to hold it.