

Drinking in scripture

WRITER USES ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE EXAMPLES TO TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE

By: John Longhurst

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Christophe Ena / The Associated Press files

In his book, Matthew Anderson, who teaches theology at Concordia University in Montreal, uses drinks as a 'fun' way for people to explore the Bible.

What alcoholic drink goes best with the first chapter of Genesis? What should you pair with the book of Joshua? What about Revelation?

Answers to those questions are found in *Pairings: The Bible and Booze* by Matthew Anderson. (Novalis.)

In the book Anderson, who teaches theology at Concordia University in Montreal, uses drinks as a “fun” way for people to explore the Bible.

“I’m always looking for new ways to communicate the old truths of the Bible,” said Anderson, an ordained Lutheran minister who was born in Saskatchewan and now resides in Dublin, Ireland, where his wife is teaching at a local university.

He hit on the idea of using drinks to help teach about the Bible while drinking a red wine from Chile made from Carménère grapes — grapes that originally came from France.

That wine, transplanted in that South American country and now viewed as a local variety, made him think about a story in the Hebrew scriptures, or what Christians call the Old Testament.

“I thought of Ruth, a stranger in Israel who was adopted into the family of Israel,” he said. “Like Ruth, that wine in Chile crossed borders and was made welcome in that country and culture.”

From there Anderson began to spin out ideas for a book using wine, beer and spirits

to help people engage the Bible while having fun at the same time.

Anderson is quick to point out he isn't a wine connoisseur.

"I grew up in a working-class home where wine was served maybe two times a year," said the longtime Roughriders fan. "Rye and Coke and beer were the drinks of choice. Nothing fancy."

One of the chapters in the book is titled "When Life is the Bitters: Campari and Soda and the Psalms of Contrition."

"To raise a glass of bitters to one's lips is to taste thousands of years of biblical interpretation, worship, monastic meditation and herbal medicine-making," he said in the book, adding "Few drinks have the strong — if somewhat tangled — ties to the Bible as do these."

The genealogy of bitters, he noted, includes ancient songs of Jewish worship, Christian monks, Roman politicians, medieval reformers and 19th-century chemists and hucksters.

"The feel of bitters is known to anyone who has read or sung Psalm 51," he wrote.

In another chapter, titled "Purists: Laphroaig Single Malt Islay & The Gospel of Matthew," he compares Laphroaig Scotch from the Islay region of Scotland with that book.

"Matthew is a complex gospel," he wrote. "Taking it seriously is not for the faint-hearted. There are notes in Matthew that are quite strong. In fact, they would be surprisingly harsh were they not softened by the warmth suffused elsewhere."

This is a lot like Laphroaig Scotch, he said, noting that it, like the Gospel of Matthew, has undertones that "are deep and complex. Not all whiskies are created equal; neither were all gospels."

The whole book is like that, taking different drinks and Bible passages and finding points of similarity and comparison. And since Anderson knows not everyone drinks, he includes non-alcoholic drinks with each chapter.

"I want it to be fun and educational way to learn more about the Bible, not preachy," he said, noting that "just as beer is not the same as single malt Scotch, the Bible is not something that can all be lumped together if you want to take it seriously."

Anderson may be on to something. In the book titled *Drunk: How We Sipped, Danced and Stumbled Our Way to Civilization* (LittleBrown), University of B.C. philosophy professor Edward Slingerland posits that alcohol has played a key role in helping people be creative and understand the world around them.

In the book, reviewed by Douglas Todd in the Vancouver Sun, Slingerhand explains how alcohol has "lubricated innovation and social trust through history."

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"Intoxicants provided the spark that allowed us to form truly large-scale groups," Slingerhand wrote, contributing to the development of civilization by causing humans "to become, at least temporarily, more creative, cultural and communal."

Alcohol does this because it targets the part of the brain devoted to rationality and abstract thinking, anxiety and stress, Slingerhand said, temporarily dampening those things and allowing humans to play more.

"A childlike state of mind in an adult is key to cultural innovation," he said, adding "intoxicants allow us to enter that state."

Maybe the same holds true for having a good drink while studying the Bible; Anderson's new book may be a way to find out.

Oh, and what drink goes with Genesis? Apple cider, naturally. With Joshua? Gin and tonic — a drink of invaders and colonizers. And Revelations? A bloody caesar, of course.

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