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Protestants and Catholics: Drunken Barbarians and Mellow Romans?

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The United States, as a nation, has great confusion concerning drinking. It does not appear to be able to come to a consensus regarding alcohol consumption or what constitutes moderate and responsible drinking. More awareness concerning the importance of religion in shaping aptitudes towards drinking may shed light on this ambivalence. Different religious backgrounds along with differences in cultural attitudes, that originated "in the old country" among the ancestors of immigrants of many Americans today, still shape every day thinking and assumptions concerning alcohol. Numerous studies from both the United States and Europe have suggested that Protestants consume less alcohol but perceived great problems with the substance. In contrast Roman Catholics consume more alcohol but do not perceived its consumption as problematic. The reason for this may be based in the distant past. Recent research (Engs 1991a; Engs 1995) has suggested that in antiquity different drinking cultures developed in the Northern and in the Mediterranean areas of Western Europe that still influence modern drinking patterns. These different drinking cultures were due to a number of factors the expansion of the Roman Empire.

The Development of Drinking Patterns in Europe's Distant past

In the Northern and Eastern regions of Europe, drinking to intoxication of grain based beverages at feasts or special occasions along with ambivalence (extremes of heavy drinking vs abstinence) towards alcohol emerged among these Barbarians (non-Greek speakers). There were several likely several reasons for this episodic drinking. Ales and beers were perishable and needed to be quickly consumed, there were often lean years without much available alcohol, limited supplies were consumed by the elite, and the long dark nasty winters in cramped quarters may have fostered depression and stress resulting in heavy drinking when alcohol was available. With limited alcohol a "feast or famine" situation may have occurred leading to sporadic bouts of heavy drinking whenever any alcohol was obtainable. The resulting mayhem could have led to ambivalence (either strongly against or strongly in favor of heavy alcohol consumption) as to its use within this culture (Engs 1991a, Engs1995).¹

In the Mediterranean area viticulture, daily wine consumption with meals by all members of the culture including children, the poor and servants emerged. Wine was usually diluted with water and public drunkenness was frowned upon.² Since wine could be stored it was generally available for most of the year. Wine was widely traded and used as payment by the elite for work and patronage.

Rome's Rise and Fall and its Influence on Drinking Patterns

During the Roman expansion, the west central European rural areas that became Roman provinces were introduced to urban Roman customs including daily wine drinking in moderation. Viticulture was established in regions with suitable climate and terrain (Dietler 1990; Engs, 1991a, Engs 1995).³ When Rome's influence declined in the west, the oldest Southern provinces retained the old Roman culture along with drinking patterns characterized by wine consumption as part of the diet. These cultures now include Italy, Spain, Portugal, southern France and Greece. The newer established provinces of West Central Europe that were subsequently invaded by various Germanic tribes during the early middle ages developed a "blended" pattern of drinking. Both beer and wine were consumed with meals, and at other times. Public intoxication was more or less frowned upon. These cultures now include northern France, southwestern Germany, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland. Britain lost its veneer of Romanization and returned to pre-Roman Celtic, mixed with Germanic, practices. Although the elite continued to consume wine brought in by traders.

The Germanic and other cultures east of the Rhine, untouched by direct Roman influence, continued their traditional heavy, "feast", "binge" or episodic drinking patterns. Grain based brews and mead, not wine, were the preferred alcoholic beverages. When distillation was introduced spirits were adopted. These cultures today include Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, north-eastern Germany and north-eastern Europeans. The drinking pattern in the Roman provinces of Asia and North Africa evolved differently from those in most of Europe as a result of the spread of Islam with strictures against alcoholic beverages (Engs, 1991; Engs 1995).

Why there is a Difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic Drinking Patterns

The development of ancient drinking norms, found in modern western European cultures, have support in statistical analysis that suggests "a significantly ($p < .05$) positive association between being a Roman Province, [speaking a Latin based] Romance language, viticulture and high per capita wine consumption. There is also a negative association between per capita beer consumption and Romance language" (Engs 1995:236). In other words former Roman Provinces that tend to speak a Latin based language, consume much wine and have commercial wine interests. Table 1 shows characteristics of western European countries in terms of alcohol consumption, religion, language base and alcohol control policies.

Table 1: Ranking of 16 western European countries by per capita absolute alcohol consumption (lowest to highest).^a Per capita consumption of wine and beer,^b roots of its language,^c number of alcohol control policies,^d the presence or absence of commercial viticulture,^e predominant religion,^f and status as a Roman province.^g

Country	Liters/year Absolute Alcohol	KG/year Wine Beer	Language	Number Control Policies	Viticulture	Religion	Roman province
Norway	5.7	4 46	Germanic	26	No	Prot.	No
Finland	6.0	3 63	Neither	-	No	Prot.	No
Sweden	7.1	9 48	Germanic	24	No	Prot.	No
U.K.	9.8	8 121	Germanic	17	Parts	Prot.	South
Ireland	10.0	3 81	Neither	16	No	R.C.	No
Denmark	11.0	14 132	Germanic	13	No	Prot.	No
Germany (east of Rhine)	12.0	11 139	Germanic	-	No	Prot.	No
Netherlands	12.1	13 87	Germanic	9	No	Prot.	No
Germany (west of Rhine)	12.7	25 146	Germanic	12	Yes	Both	Yes
Switzerland	13.3	43 69	Both	14	Parts	Both	Yes
Belgium/ Luxembourg	16.9	20 130	Both	10	No	R.C.	Yes
Austria	14.4	36 105	Germanic	8	Yes	R.C.	Yes
Portugal	-	85 28	Romance	-	Yes	R.C.	Yes
Italy	16.0	89 18	Romance	6	Yes	R.C.	Yes
Spain	19.2	61 48	Romance	10	Yes	R.C.	Yes
France	20.8	94 44	Romance	15	South	R.C.	Yes

a. Adapted from Davies and Walsh (1983), Davies (1984), and FAO (1984), b. FAO (1984), c. Renfrew (1987), d. Davies (1983), Davies (1984), e. Jan de Blij (1983), f. *Europa Year Book* (1989). g. Garnsey and Saller (1987)

Analyses of these data found in Table 2 suggest the importance of the culture's religion in terms of the way drinking is perceived within the society. This includes language, alcohol control policies and what types of beverages are popular. A significant ($p < .05$) association# with being a Protestant culture, many alcohol control policies ($r=.66$) and a Germanic language ($r= .65$) is found. Protestantism is not associated with having commercial viticulture ($r=-.58$), being a former Roman province ($r=-.75$), wine consumption ($r=-.54$) and total absolute alcohol consumption ($r=-.75$). The opposite is found for Roman Catholic cultures.

Table 2: Pearson correlation results between total per capita alcohol consumption (Liters/year), wine consumption (KG/year), beer consumption (KG/year), predominant religion, language base, viticulture, and the number of alcohol control policies.#

	Absolute Alcohol	Wine Consumed	Beer	Religion	Language	Viticulture	Control policies
Absolute alcohol	1.0	.8*	-.3	.8*	.8*	.8*	-.7*
Wine		1.0	-.5	.5+	.8*	.8*	-.5
Beer			1.0	-.3	-.6+	-.5	-.1
Religion				1.0	.8+	.6+	-.7+
Language spoken					1.0	.7*	-.4
Viticulture						1.0	-.5
Control Policies							1.0

 * $p < .001$ + $p < .05$

Note: Ordinal data including being a Protestant culture, not being a Roman province, Germanic based language, and non-vine growth were coded as "1". Being a Roman Catholic culture, a Roman province, having a Romance language and viticulture, were coded "3". Countries having both characteristics were coded "2". Significant positive associations are characteristics of Catholic cultures and negative associations of Protestant cultures. "r" values rounded up to save space on the table.

In brief the contemporary Northern European cultures tend to be Protestant, perceive many problems related to alcohol, which are expressed in numerous public policies to control its consumption, and have low alcohol consumption rates compared to the more Southern European Roman Catholic cultures. Protestant cultures tend to be grain rather than wine drinkers, were not likely to have viticulture in antiquity due to the climate, and were not under direct Roman

influence in antiquity. Protestant Northern cultures speak languages derived from a Germanic (with the exception of Finland) rather than Latin based languages found in southern cultures (other than Greece). Blended cultures have a long history of both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (Germany and Switzerland for example).

The Protestant Germanic-language Temperance Connection

During the Reformation, Protestantism took root in the Northern "Germanic" cultures. Levine (1992,17) has noted that "in Western societies, only Nordic and English-speaking cultures developed large, ongoing, extremely popular temperance movements in the nineteenth century and the first third or so of the twentieth century." He also observed that temperance—anti-alcohol—cultures have been, and still are, Protestant societies. Protestantism during its emergence, and also today, was not merely a set of theological beliefs. It was a social psychology system with a focus on self-restraint and self-regulation. Drunkenness and episodic drinking patterns leading to mayhem, vomiting and brutality, found from antiquity in the Northern cultures, were perceived as "out of control" behaviors. By extension temperance movements, and in particular abstinence movements, which reached their greatest influence in the United States, was the middle-class Protestant establishment's effort to force self-restraint upon groups that were perceived as being out of control (ie, heavy drinking Irish Catholic immigrants)⁴ (Levine 1983; 1992; Geertz 1973; Engs 1999).

Anglo-American Protestant revivalists were particularly interested in temperance and spawned wide scale temperance and/or prohibition movements. Missionaries from these revivalist religious groups successfully evangelized several countries, such as Sweden, which in turn developed a large temperance movement. Iceland and Finland also developed temperance movements and instituted some prohibition efforts during the early part of the twentieth century. There was some temperance interest among Protestants in Denmark, Holland, Switzerland and Germany (Levine 1992). However, it did not develop into a national movement which Eriksen (1990) argues was likely due, particularly in Denmark, to pietistic Lutheranism.

Wide scale temperance movements and anti-alcohol sentiments have not been, and are not, found in southern European Roman Catholic countries. People in wine drinking cultures generally do not hold negative views about alcohol, or perceive problems from its use, even though they consume two to four times more absolute alcohol than northern cultures (See Table 1 for per-capita consumption table). "The wine drinkers have higher mortality from heavy use, but the Protestant drinkers talk more about addiction" (Levine, 1992,26). In hard-drinking eastern European Catholic countries, such as Russia and Poland, sporadic anti-drunk campaigns have been launched but have only been short lived. This has also been found in Ireland (Levine, 1992).

When the New World was settled, each culture brought its own drinking norm. Many early settlers in the New World were part of a religious body that led to a very early connection between Protestants and Roman Catholics and their respective drinking attitudes, beliefs and practices in both North and South America. Some of the first industries established by Northern Culture immigrants were breweries and distilleries. Breweries were established by the Puritans and other British and Dutch settlers. In contrast, settlers or conquerors from the Southern Cultures established vineyards. In South America vineyards were immediately planted by the monastic communities (Weisman 1996). Those who were from the "blended" cultures of west central Europe brought both brewing and viticulture. An example of this was Saint Meinrad Archabbey, a Benedictine Monastery in Southern Indiana.

In the United States "Protestantism" as a whole is ambivalent about alcohol. Many denominations, such as certain Baptist and Methodist along with Mormon, Pentecostal and Holiness groups, consider any alcohol consumption as evil and sinful. They see the substance as unacceptable in any circumstances even when consumed in moderation with meals. Other Protestant groups such as Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians consider moderate use as acceptable but generally frown upon drunkenness. Roman Catholics from all cultures tend to be less ambivalent and more accepting of alcohol consumption.

In terms of research and studies concerning alcohol, there is a vast difference between the Northern and Southern European based cultures. Researchers in the United States and other "Northern" Protestant cultures, for the most part, have focused studies on negative aspects of drinking. Very little "alcoholism" and "problem" or "binge" drinking research has been done by researchers in Southern European cultures. Most studies concerning alcohol from Southern Europe focus on alcohol consumption as a way to enhance meals, pleasant conversation and health.

Conclusion

Understanding the difference in drinking norms between the two main Christian traditions found in the United States today, in terms of ancient drinking cultures, is a major key in understanding our social attitudes towards alcohol consumption. These current attitudes appear to have roots in a time well before the Reformation and are important to acknowledge in our multi-cultured nation.

ENDNOTES

1. Drinking to intoxication among the Northern and Eastern Europeans from antiquity through the middle ages and into modern times is supported by classical literature, historical manuscripts, and archeological findings. See Engs (1991a; 1995) for detailed references. See also Wiseman (1997) who suggests additional research findings which support the hypothesis
2. Dilution of wine with water is still practiced by the Roman Catholic Church as part of religious ritual.
3. A period of drunkenness beginning in the mid first-century B.C.E. and lasting for about a hundred years is considered an exception to the more moderate drinking patterns found throughout the rest of Roman and southern-European history. For further details on Roman drinking patterns in antiquity see Engs (1995) and Purcell (1985).
4. Ireland is the exception to this model. Although it became Roman Catholic in the early middle-ages it was not a Roman Province and did not develop Protestantism during the Reformation. Ireland continued Celtic alcohol consumption patterns and also integrated similar patterns from their Nordic invaders. During the first millennium, Ireland was relatively isolated from the continent. This isolation resulted in continuation of the old "feast drinking" and a more Spartan monastic culture.

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