
Alcohol and Anxiety

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

I'm at a party, or even a small gathering, or maybe I've just been introduced to someone who is especially jovial. They learn I am an Episcopalian. They like goofy jokes, and inevitably I hear this one: "You know, wherever you have four Episcopalians, there's always a fifth." Yes. Ha Ha. I've heard that joke only about five thousand times. And I've heard it two thousand times describing some other religious denomination or group.

Yes, alcohol jokes are usually funny. They make fun of crazy behavior, or moral weakness, or just plain old social relationships. And, jokes are always funnier when people are anxious. If people are at all anxious about anything, they tend to laugh more quickly.

In case you haven't noticed, these are anxious times in the world. In case, you haven't noticed it, this is wintertime. Winter can be especially dark and lonely. In case, you haven't noticed it, during this economic downturn, liquor sales are actually up. Thus, I want to say a quick word about alcohol and anxiety. In short, they do not work well together.

A friend of mine stopped drinking the other day. He says he has not actually stopped for good. But he has stopped for a season (he wants to lose weight, too). And he told me he feels much better. I can believe that. Like you, I have many friends who have stopped drinking altogether; they are wise and wonderful.

Personally, as many of you know, I am not opposed to drinking. I enjoy great wine and sturdy bourbon (not together). But I try to be careful during times of anxiety; in fact, I try to be careful at all times.

The problem is this. I believe that alcohol actually exaggerates moods that are already present in a person. We drink wine at a wedding because the setting is festive and wonderful. The wine helps to add to the celebration and fun. Drinking at a happy occasion adds to the happiness! But alcohol also exaggerates other moods. If you are depressed and drinking, your depression will certainly become fiercer. If you are sad and drinking, your sadness will become darker.

And, if you are anxious and drinking, your anxiety will increase. In case you haven't noticed, these are anxious times in the world. Be careful about your drinking habits. This is one more piece of advice I am offering to all sorts of people weathering these times: Too much alcohol increases anxiety; it does not wash it away.

Does this have anything to do with God? Yes, because good physical condition makes for good spiritual condition. This is physical advice that will help your spirituality these days. If you are anxious, avoid alcohol in excess. Drink a glass of fresh water and kiss someone you love (Romans 16:16).

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler