

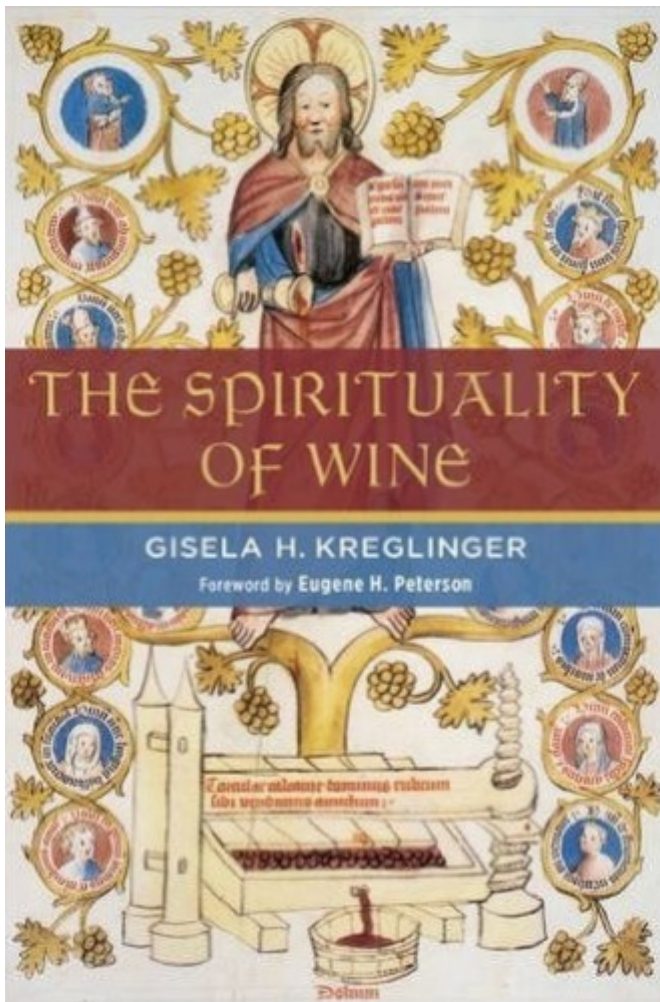
What's in your bottle?

Wine is a good gift from God. Coca-Cola is not. (But is it really that simple?)

by [Elizabeth Palmer](#)

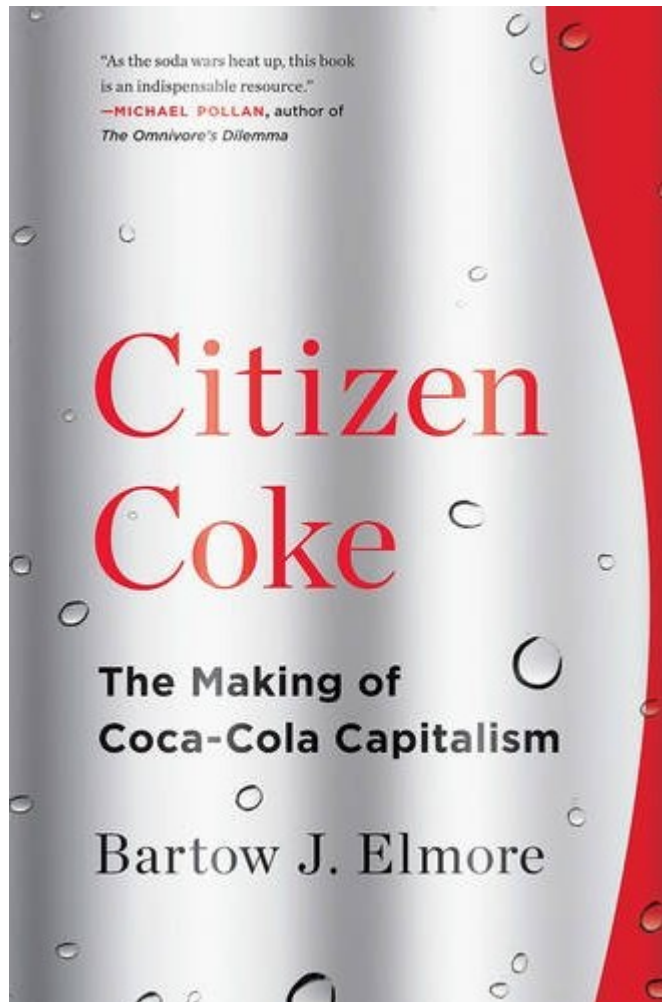
January 24, 2017

In Review



The Spirituality of Wine

by Gisela H. Kreglinger
Eerdmans



Citizen Coke

The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism

by Bartow J. Elmore
Norton

“Christ is the noble grape that was crushed in the divine winepress so that the world might be reconciled with God and receive everlasting life,” writes Gisele Kreglinger, a theologian who grew up on her family’s [winery](#) in Germany. She locates in wine a robust mixture of holistic joy and yearning for redemption. Her book is a compendium of all things related to wine and religion: it includes a reading of the film *Babette’s Feast*, a brief history of the relationship between blood and wine, excurses on fermentation and soil, interpretations of scripture, theological riffs, and

summaries of Christians' relationships to wine through history. It's a charming, informative, fun book—a primer that wine lovers will savor.

However, I recommend it primarily for readers who don't have a deep personal connection to addiction. The chapter on alcoholism, subtitled "Rescuing Wine from the Gluttons for the Contemplatives," treads the dangerous waters of viewing addiction through the lens of sin. Although Kreglinger aims for a full-bodied conception of sin that includes its moral, social, psychological, and physical dimensions, the label *gluttons* carries through this chapter a sense of judgment that isn't sufficiently (at least in my reading) undone. I'm guessing that Kreglinger has the theological chops to develop a more robust notion of sin that encompasses all the complications and social implications that arise around addiction. I hope she will do so in another book.

That caveat aside, Kreglinger's book is a delight. It encourages joy, which—for me, at least—has been in short supply over the past few months. And not just any joy, but a joy that is deeply connected to the work of Christ. My toddler recently responded to the question "what do you like most about church?" with the excited reply "dip it in the wine!" A similar sense of sacramental pleasure undergirds Kreglinger's work.

Coca-Cola is as ubiquitous in our culture as wine, but it seems much further removed from divine grace. Bartow J. Elmore's fascinating book, recently released in paperback, is a study in the Coca-Cola Company's economic model, which from the beginning has "maintained a lean corporate figure" by relying on "infrastructure built and managed by a host of public and private sector partners." Elmore shows how the company, over its 130-year history, has mastered the use of outsourcing and lobbying strategies to secure its place in the global market, sometimes to the detriment of local workforces and environments:

This was the brilliance of the Coca-Cola capitalism. By not owning its many distributors and by relying on native intermediaries in foreign nations, Coke could claim that it was a critical component of the local economy . . . and therefore a worthy beneficiary of local public resources and natural capital. Once embedded in host communities, Coca-Cola became very difficult to dislodge, even in places where it caused serious environmental problems, because killing Coke meant killing jobs.

Each chapter of the book focuses on one of Coke's major ingredients, and there is very little good news in any of them when it comes to economic justice, ecological stewardship, and health. Elmore cites scientific studies that trace high-fructose corn syrup's effect on obesity rates, the effects of artificial sweeteners on metabolism and perceptions of hunger, and the addictive qualities of caffeine.

Before I read this book, I probably would've answered the question "Coke or Pepsi?" with a halfhearted request for Diet Pepsi. Now I will probably answer "neither." Although Elmore focuses on Coca-Cola's brilliantly exploitative economic model, his book is a startling reminder of how hard it is to be ethical, healthy consumers in relation to *any* of the products that shape our lives. Wine included.

It's true that some businesses are more attuned to environmental concerns and human rights than others. And it's true that the most ethical thing for us to drink, given the world in which we live, would probably be tap water. It's also true that, when I recently asked a friend who is a pastor, a father, and a prolific writer how he manages to do it all, he answered "Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Diet Coke after the kids go to bed."

Might there be a bit of grace in that bottle of Diet Coke?