



Bonus: Another Excerpt from a Theological Dialogue with an African Neighbor

By Carl E. Rockrohr

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I provide here one excerpt from an interview with a Konkomba man which was not included in my essay, "Natural Law in an African Context" in the recently published *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal* (Concordia Publishing House, 2011).

When Robert Baker, the General Editor of the book, and I discussed the fact that the following excerpt would not be included in the published work, I said "I may put the cut portion on my website and advertise it as a 'bonus excerpt' to the other excerpts which can be read in the book." To which Rev. Baker said, "Great, Carl! Thanks so much." So at the encouragement of my editor, what follows is *bonus* to what is offered in *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*. [Available at <http://www.cph.org/p-18350-natural-law-a-lutheran-reappraisal.aspx> ©!]

Context of the Interview

So that the reader of this brief article knows the context of this interview I quote myself in the following 3 paragraphs from pages 187-188 of *Natural Law: A Lutheran Reappraisal*.

In 2000, I conducted dissertation research in Ghana, West Africa.²⁶ Working with host pastors and lay members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana (ELCG), many of whom I had known while a missionary, I conducted interviews in six tribal areas of Ghana. The goal was to research not only some beliefs of traditional African sacrifices but also to test out an approach of cross-cultural systematic theology called the "Four Voices." Instead of relying on a universal theory such as animism to quantify what an African non-Christian believes, the approach relies upon theological dialogue from four sources: the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, the African traditional practitioner, and the African Christian.

The approach consisted of three interviews held in each of the six tribal areas. The main interview would be conducted with a person who practiced traditional blood sacrifices, the African Traditional Practitioner (ATP). I would first interview the area host (a Christian pastor or layperson) regarding what the host expected to hear and learn during the interview with the ATP. This was the preparatory interview. The main interview was then conducted with the ATP with the host present. Finally, I interviewed the host again in a debriefing interview that allowed for reflection and clarification of any points in question. The preparatory and debriefing interviews were done in English, while the main interview was conducted in the local tribal language with a translator.

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The following excerpts are from the main interviews in the Konkomba area. The excerpts illustrate evidence of natural law and opportunities for that shared common knowledge to provide a bridge for further theological dialogue. The interviews are dense with linguistic, theological, cultural, and sociological details. It is not possible here to delve into all of these details, but a few comments after each excerpt will help the reader to observe and reflect upon what one African neighbor believes about the existence of the Creator and the will of that Creator. What knowledge of natural law does this man share with the Christian?

Bonus Excerpt

Now to the *bonus*:

Rockrohr: So the soothsayer is the teacher for the sacrifice?

ATP: Almost every single time you must go to a soothsayer before you know what to give.

Rockrohr: OK. That was a lot of information he has given me about those sacrifices. Thank you very much. . . . Does he have any proverbs about the sacrifices that he makes?

ATP: Only they do not have a proverb, but after they make sacrifice to the land god, like at this time it is not raining, they go there with flour, flour from corn or flour from millet, after the sacrifice they put it down, and they tell the land god, "Well you have taken your sacrifice and see how dry our land is. We want that before we get back to the house we want the rain to come and wet this flour. And wet the whole land for us. So that we will have a good harvest."

Rockrohr: So this is a proverb that they tell to the land god?

ATP: Yes.

Rockrohr: So have you seen that happen?

ATP: Yes. Every single time they do this they have seen the rain.

Comment by Pastor A¹: When the old men kill a fowl, it struggled [?] by the soothsayer. The soothsayer will tell them to do it, but when they slaughter the fowl, and the fowl is making some signs, to tell them that the sacrifice is accepted. But the one making the sacrifice is still not sure. So they say, "Yes, the chicken has seen the hotness of the knife, but we will see how we sleep." Don't they say that?

ATP: Yes, it is exactly as pastor has said. Normally, after they have slaughtered the chicken, "If it is true, the chicken will tell. If it is a lie told by the soothsayer, then the chicken will tell us."

Rockrohr: Oh. So the soothsayer might tell lies?

¹ The interview host is noted by a letter to preserve confidentiality.

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ATP: Yes, sometimes a soothsayer can tell a lie. So if he tells a lie and the idol rejects the sacrifice, you have to go to a different soothsayer. The correct one you know will be able to predict to you what kind of sacrifice to give. And at times too you have to move far away, to somebody who does not know you at all. Because he does not know about your house and he will tell you the truth.

Comment by Pastor A: And another proverb they have, I don't know if it is true, when they tie the animal, especially the sheep, they tell the sheep, you know they don't like to kill the sheep, they tell the sheep, "It is the soothsayer who has said it." And they have a proverb that says, "The sheep does not fear its owner's knife." Don't they say it?

ATP: (laughing) Yes, the animal is created by God. And any time they are going to slaughter an animal to an idol, they have tell the animal, "Animal, we love you so much, we know you belong to us. We don't want to slaughter you. But a soothsayer is asking us to slaughter you for this kind of sacrifice. So when you get to God, and God asks you, tell him this is what the soothsayer said. It is not we, the slaughterers, that want to kill you, but the soothsayer said it."

Rockrohr: So the soothsayer . . . ?

ATP: will be judged by God. . . [Interpreter comments: God will judge the soothsayer because he predicted it. But he [the owner] did not know. But it was after the soothsayer said "Go and pick the black goat and slaughter." So he is only doing the slaughter on behalf of the soothsayer.] . . . And the reason why they always fear and make sacrifices is because if the soothsayer tells you to go and make sacrifices and you refuse, that you know that God wanted you to make the sacrifice and you refused. The Lord God will call you. And if he calls you because he is your master, you will not have time to come back here again. That means you will die.

Buy the Book for More of the Interview

So, dear reader, here was your bonus. For four more excerpts and some thoughtful reflection from me on theological dialogue with one's neighbor, and for many other very great essays on Natural Law by other theologians you will need to obtain the book!

Available at: <http://www.cph.org/p-18350-natural-law-a-lutheran-reappraisal.aspx>

In Christ,
Carl E. Rockrohr