

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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The White Horse Inn: Nonsense on Tap

A reader recently sent us this email:

Dr. Robbins,

I doubt you listen to the White Horse Inn, but I felt the need to pass this on to you. On July 8, 2007, they had an interview with Anne Rice, a Roman Catholic author that returned to the "Christian faith" of her childhood. Michael Horton tried to find common ground with her on a bunch of things throughout the whole show. He gave her a big platform to tout her garbage without any rebuttal, clarification, or warning. It made me so mad that I emailed the program and have been going back and forth with the show's producer, Shane Rosenthal. Would you be interested in reading a couple of these emails? You may or may not be shocked by some of the things he wrote to me. Long story short, I think I am about to part ways with the White Horse Inn after listening for 10 years. I am going to try to keep the emails going with Shane to try to show him some of the errors of his apologetics. He is basically an evidentialist.

If you have time, take a listen to the program and tell me what you think about the interview [www.oneplace.com/](http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/The_White_Horse_Inn/archives.asp?bcd=2007-7-8)

[ministries/The_White_Horse_Inn/archives.asp?bcd=2007-7-8](http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/The_White_Horse_Inn/archives.asp?bcd=2007-7-8)

God bless,

Travis

A little later, before I could reply to the first email, the same reader sent another:

Dr. Robbins,

I hate to bother you again, and I am sure this is not a shocker, but please read this email from Shane Rosenthal, the producer of the White Horse Inn.... It starts with a quote from me in [blue](#). I would love to get your take on this email, although I know pretty much how you might respond. The only thing I am not certain about is how to properly treat his comments about general and special revelation from a Clarkian perspective. If it is not too much of a burden, please take the time to respond to this email point for point for me and for my benefit. It won't be sent to

him. I am already writing a rebuttal of my own, and I want to compare mine and yours just so I can see for myself, to make sure my grasp of Clark, Scripturalism, and the whole of Christianity is consistent. Thanks in advance.

What Is the White Horse Inn?

Allow me to provide some background information. The "White Horse Inn," despite its name, is a radio program. To quote its website, "Launched in 1990, The White Horse Inn (named after the pub in Cambridge, England, where the Reformation came to the English-speaking world), is a nationally syndicated radio broadcast featuring regular round-table discussions on faith, culture and apologetics. Hosted by Michael Horton, Ken Jones, Kim Riddlebarger, and Rod Rosenblatt, the White Horse Inn aims each week to equip Christians to 'know what they believe and why they believe it.'" Notice that the aim of the White Horse Inn "each week" is to "equip Christians to know what they believe and why they believe it."

"Though the hosts have different denominational and ethnic backgrounds, the White Horse Inn unites itself on the principle [*sic*] slogans of the Protestant Reformation, such as the sufficiency of Scripture, salvation by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone, and the importance of a God-centered, rather than human-centered outlook. By renewed attention to these classic and central themes on a weekly basis, it is the aim of the White Horse Inn to bring health and vigor to a church that appears to have in some ways lost its sense of missions [*sic*]."

Please note the commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture and salvation by faith alone, and the statement that "renewed attention to these classic and central themes" is paid "on a weekly basis." These repeated statements – "each week," "weekly basis" – leave no room for radio programs in which the central ideas of the Reformation are not discussed and endorsed. This is a commendable purpose, but as we have already seen with the program featuring the Roman Catholic novelist Anne Rice, it is not being fulfilled; and, as will shortly become apparent, the Anne Rice program is only a symptom of a serious error: an Anti-Biblical and Anti-Reformational philosophy and theology that corrupts the programming at the White Horse Inn.

Well, who are the men tending bar at the White Horse Inn? Again, I quote from their website:

"The Rev. Dr. Michael S. Horton is the J. Gresham Machen professor of systematic theology and apologetics at Westminster Seminary California. He is the main host of The White Horse Inn radio broadcast and editor-in-chief of *Modern Reformation* magazine. He received his M.A. from Westminster Seminary California, his Ph.D. from Wycliff Hall, Oxford and the University of Coventry, and also completed a Research Fellowship at Yale University Divinity School... Dr. Horton is a minister in the United Reformed Churches of North America [URCNA].

"The Rev. Dr. Kim Riddlebarger is the senior pastor of Christ Reformed Church in Anaheim, California (URCNA), visiting professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary California, and co-host of The White Horse Inn radio program. A fourth generation Californian, Kim is a graduate of California State University Fullerton (B.A.), Simon Greenleaf University (M.A.), Westminster Theological Seminary (M.A.R.), and Fuller Theological Seminary (Ph.D.) where he worked under Richard A. Muller. Dr. Riddlebarger is a regular contributor to publications such as *Modern Reformation* and *Table Talk*.

"A native of Los Angeles, California, Rev. Jones is a graduate of Pepperdine University and a co-host of The White Horse Inn.... Rev. Jones has contributed articles for *Modern Reformation* and publishes a monthly newsletter called the 'Lyceum.'

"The Rev. Dr. Rod Rosenblatt is professor of theology at Concordia University in Irvine, California, and an ordained minister in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. A native of the Pacific Northwest, Dr. Rosenblatt was educated at Pacific Lutheran University (B.S.), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (M.A.), Capitol Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and The University of Strasbourg (Ph.D.)."

Please note that the "main hosts," Horton and Riddlebarger, were educated at Westminster Theological Seminary and teach at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Note that three of the four (and probably all four) write for *Modern Reformation* magazine, of which Horton is editor-in-chief. One might think that such an august company of "Reverend Doctors," whose biographies emphasize their interest in and profession of the ideas of the Reformers, might show some discernment about inviting guests on their radio show and giving them free rein in speaking their minds without correction or objection. But the bartenders at this Inn are not like Luther or Calvin; they freely broadcast error in the name of the Reformation. One might also think that these studious professorial types would be aware of Luther's and Calvin's contempt for Aristotle's philosophy, but if they are, they show no signs of it, for they endorse empiricism and ridicule the Biblical position of Luther and Calvin.

Anne Rice, Vampire Novelist

Here is what the producer of the White Horse Inn, whose job it is to line up guests for the show, wrote to a listener who objected to his programming. He starts by quoting the listener:

To allow this program [Michael Horton's conversation with Roman Catholic Anne Rice] to be broadcast without at least clearing up the distinctions and differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed faith is unacceptable ...there was NO clarification about anything when you let that Roman Catholic woman have a platform! Why can't you just say, "I see your point"? What if there was a first time listener tuning in that day? What impression would they have of the White Horse Inn?

Rosenthal (WHI) replied: Again, if the focus of the show were related to soteriology, we would certainly have made the distinctions you are looking for. But the show did not get into those details.

Robbins: This is a revealing statement. In the mind of the show's producer and host (Rosenthal frequently appears on the program), the doctrine of salvation – soteriology – is a "detail." Had Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers thought this way, there would have been no Reformation. The doctrine of salvation was not a detail to the Reformers; it was central in their thinking and in the Reformation. The genuine Reformers, unlike the pub-tenders at the White Horse Inn, were not deceived by "worldview thinking." Luther and Calvin, Knox and Latimer did not think: We have so much in common with the Romanists, we need to make common cause with them in opposing humanism and Islam. The Reformers did not say: We can be co-belligerents with Rome, since we agree on God, Jesus Christ, abortion, and so many other things. Rather than splitting the Church, let us make a united front against the Turk. No, rather than being deceived by the popular sort of worldview thinking which says that one can have a Christian worldview without the Christian Gospel, the Reformers, like the Apostle Paul, made soteriology the centerpiece of Christianity. But the producer of the White Horse Inn says soteriology is a "detail."

Not only does Rosenthal's philosophy contradict Scripture and Reformed theology, it is a breach of the promise the White Horse Inn makes at its website to emphasize the ideas of salvation by grace alone and the sufficiency of Scripture "each week."

WHI: The focus of the show was Anne Rice's frustration with bad New Testament scholarship and her abandonment of atheism.

Robbins: I guess there are no Christians or scholars who can criticize contemporary New Testament "scholarship" that could be invited to the White Horse Inn. Anne Rice is neither a Christian nor a New Testament scholar, and her "frustration" is hardly of interest to anyone. She is a novelist best known for her books about vampires. That's right, vampires. Unlike the genuine Christians in *Acts 19:19*, Rice has not repudiated, let alone burned, her satanic books. As for atheism, lots of people abandon atheism and adopt a new false religion – and there is nothing commendable in it. Quite frankly, a candid atheist who uses words in their ordinary meanings is, on this point, morally and philosophically superior to religionists

who twist words to mean something other than what the Bible means so that they can pretend to be Christians. And what should we think of pubtenders who tell their listeners that an atheist, by submitting to the Roman Church-State, has returned to the “Christian faith”?

More Miscreants

WHI: In the same way, we did not feel it necessary to make any soteriological distinctions with guest Rabbi Benjamin Blech during our conversation with him about God and suffering, or with Gerald Schroeder in our conversation with him about science and faith.

Robbins: Rosenthal admits – no, that is the wrong word: He *brags* – that the White Horse Inn has given a nationwide platform to a Rabbi (Someone once said, Call no man on Earth “Rabbi”) who denies that Jesus is the Christ – thus, according to Scripture (see *1 John* 4:3), an antichrist – in order to gain his insights about God and suffering.

Rosenthal says, “we did not feel it necessary to make any soteriological distinctions” with Blech. Please notice that the White Horse Inn has upped the ante. Anne Rice at least professed to be a Christian, however false her profession might be. But Blech denies Christ altogether, not making even a profession of faith in him. He is a blatant unbeliever. And yet Rosenthal says that “we did not feel it necessary to make any soteriological distinctions with guest Rabbi Benjamin Blech.” Think about that: The White Horse Inn does not feel it necessary to distinguish between Christianity and the false religion of Judaism. Apparently this feeling stems from the notion that an unbeliever like Blech has some truth to tell us about God and suffering. Blech, of course, does not believe the Old Testament. Christ himself said so: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me...” (*John* 5:46). To complete the argument for the benefit of the tipplers at the White Horse Inn, Jews, such as Blech, do not believe Jesus; therefore, they do not believe Moses. It is a complete fiction to say that Orthodox Jews believe the Old Testament. Those who assert that unrepentant Jews believe the Old Testament call Christ a liar.

Note again that the Inn’s commendable and stated purpose of presenting the sufficiency of Scripture and salvation by grace and faith alone “each week” is not achieved because a false theory of knowledge controls its choice of guests. Bad epistemology drives out good theology.

To anticipate an excuse theologians frequently offer for such un-Biblical behavior, the hosts at the White Horse Inn are not doing this out of love for either their guests or their audience or Christ. If they loved them, they would warn them about their false ideas. They have betrayed both Christ and the elect.

As for Gerald Schroeder, he is a nuclear physicist, a former professor at MIT, and an Orthodox Jew. He has written books trying to reconcile *Genesis* 1 with current scientific opinion (which is itself a foolish act, since no scientific method can furnish truth), and he does this by arguing that the six days of *Genesis* 1 are actually 15

billion years, thus twisting the Word of God, which he does not believe (see *John* 5:46), to appease his real god, science, which he does believe. Once again, the White Horse Inn gave a guest who denies Christ a nationwide platform from which to promote his Antichristian ideas.

Why would they do this? Is this done out of inadvertence or oversight? No, it is not. It is a deliberate policy of the White Horse Inn, and it is based on the notion that truth – including truth about theology: God, suffering, science, creation, and salvation – may be found in many different places, not just in Scripture, and that even unbelievers such as Blech, Rice, and Schroeder can teach us truth about such things.

WHI: We have had two United Methodist theologians on the program (Thomas Oden and William Willimon), and if we were to explore their views of salvation, I’m sure we’d find a number of differences.

Robbins: Rosenthal continues to brag about the ecumenism of the White Horse Inn: They have invited Romanists, Jews, and Methodists, giving them all a nationwide platform to promote their Antichristian theological ideas. In all this the sufficiency of the Bible and the doctrines of the Reformation are deliberately omitted, not forgotten but avoided. Rosenthal writes: “if we were to explore their views of salvation, I’m sure we’d find a number of differences,” indicating once again that no such “exploration” occurred, and therefore the Biblical view of Scripture and salvation was not presented. So much for promises to do so “each week.”

It is important to be clear what is happening here. The guiding philosophy behind the policies of the White Horse Inn – contrary to what they say at their website – is that Scripture is not sufficient, that there are other sources of wisdom, and that we should listen to those other sources, even in matters theological. That is why they invite unbelievers to speak freely, without Biblical correction, on their programs. They give lip service to a “God-centered view,” but they believe and practice a man-centered view.

Nature Eating Up Grace

Robbins: Decades ago Francis Schaeffer warned the church about Thomas Aquinas and “nature eating up grace.” By this he meant that if you give “natural revelation” an epistemological inch, it will displace Scripture. The syncretism of Thomas Aquinas and all his followers, Romanist and Protestant, is incompatible with Christianity. Schaeffer was right, and the policy of the White Horse Inn illustrates exactly what he warned against.

WHI: However, in our discussions with these men, we greatly profited from their wisdom on a number of issues.

Robbins: Here is the key to understanding the Inn’s guest policy (who to invite and what questions not to bring up): These men have “wisdom” on many theological issues from which we have greatly profited. How contrary to Scripture this is may be seen by quoting a few verses:

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright” (*Proverbs* 2:6-7).

“...to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Colossians 2:2*).

“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect... For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? [According to Rosenthal, the wise are speaking at the White Horse Inn.] Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God...” (*1 Corinthians 1:17-20*).

This last verse, by the way, destroys every variety of “natural revelation” and natural theology: “The world through wisdom did not know God.” Knowledge of God comes only through his propositional revelation.

WHI: We also regularly quote from a wide range of sources across history, including men such as Augustine (Catholic), Josephus (Jewish), Thucydides (Greek Pagan), Anselm (Catholic), Chesterton (Catholic), C. S. Lewis (Anglican), etc. Our use of these men is never to be seen as an endorsement of all their beliefs, but merely the thought presented in the particular quote cited.

Robbins: When quoting all these men, does the White Horse Inn carry this or any disclaimer? Or is the listener left to conclude that these are men who can be trusted? If the listener who wrote the email is to be believed, there was no such disclaimer, and in fact, Anne Rice was touted as returning to the “Christian faith,” when as a matter of fact she submitted herself to the Roman Antichrist. Rosenthal here offers a disclaimer to one listener, but no disclaimer was broadcast on the program.

WHI: And thus it was with Anne Rice. We agreed with her contempt for the current status of New Testament scholarship, and we thought her fresh critique of it, coming from years as an atheist, was in some ways like the honesty of the little boy in Hans Christian Andersen's famous story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Many of our listeners may have friends or co-workers who have been influenced by this skeptical scholarship, and this program was intended to help them to be better prepared to give an answer on that subject.

Robbins: Rosenthal misses the point. Several people better qualified to speak to the issue hold contemporary New Testament scholarship in contempt. Some of them are Christians, but none of them appeared on the program. Instead, limited and expensive airtime was provided to a vampire novelist now become a Roman Catholic, and the listeners were not warned. In the next paragraph, Rosenthal gets to the heart of the matter.

General Revelation

WHI: Part of our disagreement I believe gets down to the issue of how we think of revelation. In our view, God has published two books: *general* and *special* revelation.

Robbins: In the late 16th and 17th centuries, it was common to hear Protestant scientists (then called “natural philosophers”) who opposed Romanism and its Aristotelian Scholasticism say that God has published two books – the Bible and nature. By this they meant to deny that the books of the popes, schoolmen, and Aristotle had any authority in religion or science whatsoever. It was a phrase they used at that time and in that context to reduce the alleged sources of truth from many to two. Rosenthal uses the phrase with the opposite intention: He intends to deny that Scripture alone is sufficient and to assert that it can and must be supplemented by other sources of truth, even in theology. That is why the White Horse Inn offers its resources to Jews, Romanists, Methodists, and other unbelievers: They too have wisdom. The Bible alone is not the Word of God; God's revelation comes through many sources. Rosenthal might even agree with Karl Barth, who once said that God can speak to us through dead dogs. Rosenthal calls this “general revelation.”

WHI: Both [books – general and special revelation] contain truth...

Robbins: All defenders of epistemological pluralism play with words. If truth is a property of a proposition, and only a proposition (which it is), then what is the meaning of the statement that “general revelation contains truth”? When Rosenthal looks at the sky, do the stars spell out English sentences for him? Perhaps Greek and Hebrew sentences? D. James Kennedy, another proponent of this un-Biblical theory of knowledge, thinks the Gospel is in the stars and has preached sermons on the subject. When Rosenthal examines an oak leaf, does he find there the opening verse of *Genesis*, like opening a fortune cookie? If not, then Rosenthal is equivocating on the word “truth.”

Since the literal meaning of “general revelation contains truth” is ludicrous, what does the statement actually mean? It means that natural men, using natural means, can derive truth from nature. How they do this, Rosenthal does not explain. He merely asserts it. And that is what Scripture denies, as we have already seen. *All* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are *hidden* in Christ. They are not open to inspection except by those to whom Christ reveals them. The world through wisdom did not and cannot know God.

Rosenthal asserts that truth may be found not only in Scripture but also in some sort of empirical “general revelation.” This misunderstanding of the Bible, especially *Romans* chapters 1 and 2, goes back at least to the “Angelic Doctor” of the Roman Catholic Church-State, Thomas Aquinas, who taught that when the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans he was endorsing Aristotle's pagan theory of knowledge called empiricism. But Paul was doing no such thing. *Romans* 1 and 2 do not teach that men learn truth about God or anything else from sensation, but that God has given men innate (see *Romans* 1:19 and 2:15) propositional information about him, which they suppress in unrighteousness (see *Romans* 1:21-23, 25) . Not only does Rosenthal (and many others) misunderstand Paul's teaching about innate (not learned by observation) information given by God, but he also

implies, and his arguments rest upon, the assumption that men do not suppress this information in their sin. Rather, Rosenthal's theory says that natural men, unbelievers, can obtain truth through observation, and that is why we must listen to Jews, Roman Catholics, United Methodists, and others to gain their wisdom and knowledge. The practice of the White Horse Inn is the logical outcome of its Antichristian theory of knowledge. And, of course, if this theory of knowledge is true, there is no reason to stop at inviting Jews, Romanists, and Methodists: All unbelievers learn truth from observation according to this theory, so the barkeeps at the White Horse Inn ought to invite Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, atheists, and Rastafarians: They all have "wisdom."

A cursory acquaintance with the rules of logic would make it clear to Rosenthal and his friends (and to all empiricists) that propositions, that is truth, cannot be derived from something non-propositional. Unless one starts with propositions (that is, declarative sentences), one can arrive at no truth whatsoever. Propositions – and truth is always propositional – can come only from propositions. This poses an unsolvable problem for all empiricists, for they begin with something called sensation. But the problem is completely avoided by Christians, for they believe, as Scripture says, that God is Truth itself, and he reveals truth to men in propositions, not sensations. The Second Person of the Trinity is the *Logos*, the Reason, the Wisdom, the Logic of God. He created the world.

Furthermore, Christ lights, *John* 1:9 says, echoing Romans 1 and 2, the mind of every man who comes into the world. *This* is the Biblical doctrine of general revelation. It is a denial of the pagan Aristotelian-Thomist-evidentialist-empiricist theory. The mind of every man, who is the image of God, is informed by the mind of Christ. So even if he is blind and cannot see the heavens, he has an innate idea of God. This information is innate, not learned by sensation. It makes man the image of God, and it makes all men inexcusable. It is these innate ideas that all sinners suppress in their zeal to escape God. One of the ways philosophers and theologians suppress these innate ideas is by inventing "proofs" for the existence of God derived from observation. (The pagan Aristotle is the godfather of all such proofs.) The gods they so "prove" are not the God of the Bible; they are idols – inventions of their sinful minds. If the Thomistic proofs for the existence of God were valid, they would disprove Christianity, for the gods they prove are not the God of the Bible. They are an illustration of the philosophers' desire to escape the God of the Bible.

The Bible does not begin with any proof of the existence of God; it begins with God. Nor does the Bible contain any argument attempting to prove the existence of God from what Rosenthal calls "general revelation." Such a proof is logically impossible and theologically reprehensible. Truth cannot be derived from anything non-propositional. Unless one starts with truth, with propositional revelation, one can never arrive at any truth. Unless one starts with Scripture, God will remain merely a suppressed idea.

Special Revelation

WHI: ...but admittedly special revelation is needed for "saving knowledge" (i.e., the heavens declare the glory of God, but they do not reveal the gospel of Jesus).

Robbins: Why does Rosenthal enclose the words *saving knowledge* in quotes? Does he mean to suggest that it is not really knowledge that saves? Or is he reluctant to concede that saving knowledge, which is the important part of knowledge, is not available by observation at all? If special revelation is needed for saving knowledge, as even Rosenthal admits, why invite those who reject special revelation to speak, for example, on God and suffering?

Furthermore, Rosenthal apparently does not recognize figurative speech when he reads it. "The heavens declare the glory of God" is not literal language. The stars do not spell out the words "God" and "glory," nor do they speak those words. The psalmist is not presenting a theory of knowledge, as Rosenthal imagines, and as his theory requires. The psalmist is praising God. Calvin points out that the psalmist "introduces the heavens as witnesses and preachers of the glory of God, attributing to the dumb creature a quality which, strictly speaking, does not belong to it..." The visible creation is dumb; it does not speak. Only persons speak, and truth is what God speaks in Scripture. We learn of God and his glory from Scripture; we learn of creation only from Scripture. We would not even know the heavens were the creation of God unless Scripture so informed us. Even Thomas Aquinas admitted that creation was an idea that could not be derived from observation of the world.

The notion that there are "two books," Scripture and nature, both of which teach us truth, is false. When we first understand something about God and creation, then we can appreciate God's handiwork in the heavens. We do not first observe the heavens and then conclude with creation and God. Rosenthal has things backward.

WHI: Nevertheless, God's special revelation (the Bible) did not simply drop out of heaven, but was revealed over time in history.

Robbins: Rosenthal further denigrates Scripture. To use Schaeffer's terms, we are watching nature "eat up" grace in Rosenthal's statements. By saying that the Bible "did not simply drop out of Heaven," Rosenthal insinuates the notion that even special revelation is not so special. Like everything else in creation, special revelation is mediated by time and history.

Now Rosenthal's insinuation is completely irrelevant to the question of the uniqueness and axiomatic status of Scripture. Just because God did not drop all 66 books from the sky does not mean Scripture is not unique and uniquely authoritative. Just because he did not write the 66 books with his own finger on stone as he wrote the Ten Commandments does not make Scripture any less the Word of God or any less necessary for knowing truth. Someone with an imagination like Rosenthal's should be able to think of many other ways in which God might have revealed truth to men but did not, but all these imaginations are all irrelevant to the fact that Scripture alone is the Word of God. The only reason for Rosenthal to men-

tion one imagined way God might have revealed truth to men but did not is to depreciate the way God did in fact reveal truth, in order to blur the distinction between Scripture and other alleged sources of truth.

WHI: Luke for example, does not say, "God said it, I believe it, that settles it."

Robbins: At this point in his argument, Rosenthal boldly moves from insinuating that special revelation is not all that special to a blatant attack on Scripture and the authority of God. Rosenthal discloses his refusal to acknowledge Scripture as the highest authority, against which there is no appeal. For Rosenthal, God's Word does not settle it. There is something more authoritative than a Word from God. This is the fundamental and central error of all theories of knowledge and apologetics that teach that there are two (or more) methods of obtaining truth.

WHI: Nor did he [Luke] say "what I am about to write is intended for those who accept the first principle/presupposition of faith."

Robbins: Here Rosenthal discloses his philosophical antipathy to accepting Scripture as the first principle. He has another first principle. He does not start with the Word of God, for he thinks that the Word of God is not the starting point but the conclusion of an argument that rests on more fundamental and sure premises, such as sensation.

WHI: Rather, he [Luke] says to the reader that his words are true and can be trusted because he personally checked all the sources, interviewed the eyewitnesses, and furnished a report that can be safely relied upon. It is the facts of the case, not a leap of faith, that Luke recommends to give Theophilus "certainty" (*Luke 1:4*) of the things he has been told.

Robbins: Notice that, according to Rosenthal, the basis for certainty is not the verbal and plenary inspiration of the *Gospel of Luke*, resulting in the truth, inerrancy, and authority of every sentence he wrote, but his historical research. Luke's *Gospel*, according to Rosenthal, is like any other history book written by a competent historian who checks his sources and interviews eyewitnesses. Luke is like Winston Churchill, who wrote a history of World War II; and Luke's *Gospel* is like Churchill's *Gathering Storm*. Rosenthal makes it clear that the certainty of Luke's *Gospel* is entirely due to his research; none of it is due to a "leap of faith," or to a "first principle/presupposition of faith," nor to "God said it; that settles it." There is no room in Rosenthal's theory for a specific doctrine of Scripture, for Scripture is the result of the processes of research all historians use. Its certainty is of exactly the same source and quality as that attributed to any other history book. Nature has completely "eaten up" grace in Rosenthal's account of special revelation. "Special revelation" is not special at all; in fact "special revelation" is a subset of "general revelation." By rejecting Scripture as his first principle, Rosenthal has rejected the Scriptural doctrine of Scripture altogether. It plays no part in this theology.

WHI: You [Rosenthal's listener] say that many historians are fallen in their account of who Jesus is. We would agree.

Robbins: How does Rosenthal know that Luke is not one of those "fallen" historians? His *Gospel* is now almost two thousand years old, and it is too late to check the sources and interview the eyewitnesses. Given the notorious unreliability of eyewitnesses, how does Rosenthal know that the eyewitnesses Luke interviewed reported events correctly? Note that he cannot appeal to other ordinary history books, such as Josephus,' or N. T. Wright's, for the same doubts apply to them as well. By making Luke's *Gospel* ordinary, Rosenthal has scuttled all possibility of establishing Christianity as true.

WHI: But because we believe that Jesus was a historical figure, it's not merely enough to say that the skeptical historians are wrong, or start with unbelief.

Robbins: Who says it is enough? Rosenthal is now constructing a straw man. But telling the unbelieving historians they are wrong must be done, and then we must be able to show why they are wrong. The principal reason unbelieving historians are wrong about Christ is that their statements disagree with Scripture. Shall I say it again? *Scripture is the epistemological criterion of Christianity*. Nothing else is. What Scripture affirms is true; what Scripture denies is false. Anything or anyone who disagrees with Scripture is *ipso facto* wrong. When unbelieving historians make false statements about Christ using the ordinary methods of historians, they are refuted by pointing out that no one can be sure about conclusions reached by inductive methods. That is because their conclusions do not follow logically from their premises. Rosenthal ought to read Richard Whately's essay "Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte." Even better, he ought to read Gordon Clark's book *Historiography*. They might save him from making such elementary blunders.

WHI: We also want to show *how* their methodologies are suspect and *why* the various conclusions are unjustified.

Robbins: Precisely. But Rosenthal has already said that their methodologies are the same as Luke's: checking sources and witnesses. If their methodologies are "suspect," so are Luke's. Rosenthal has already ruled out divine inspiration as the reason Luke's *Gospel* is trustworthy. He seems to be laboring under the misunderstanding that if one assumes Scripture as the first principle of Christianity that somehow precludes criticism of non-Christian views. Rosenthal seems to be completely ignorant of the 40 books of Gordon H. Clark and the many other books and essays published by The Trinity Foundation over the past 30 years. More importantly, he misunderstands the logical situation. All theologians have a first principle; and Rosenthal's is sensation, not revelation. He thinks that one must be an empiricist to criticize secular thought, not realizing that empiricism is itself the most popular form of secular thought.

WHI: Jesus really lived.

Robbins: True, but how does Rosenthal's theory allow him to know this? Can he sing, "Jesus loves me, this I

know, for the Bible tells me so”? No, he cannot. He has already ruled out the “first principle/presupposition of faith.” Perhaps he can sing, “You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart,” for that statement does not appeal to Scripture; it appeals only to experience. But then the sentiment is not at all Christian or Biblical, and the hymn should not be sung. We know that “Jesus really lived” and still lives precisely because and only because the Bible tells us so.

WHI: Therefore if a person is attempting to be honest with the tool of history, he cannot deny that Jesus existed.

Robbins: Of course he can, and the more consistent the unbeliever is, the more likely he is to deny this. But even if he admits it, it makes little difference: Christianity is not “Jesus really lived.” Even some Orthodox Jews might admit that, as well as atheists and Unitarians, all without sufficient reason, of course.

WHI: Furthermore, upon close examination, the best explanation for the NT documents is that Jesus is in fact who he claimed to be, and that he really rose from the dead.

Robbins: What does “best” mean in this context? Unless one starts with the assumption that the New Testament documents are true, the most plausible explanation for them may be that they are forgeries and fabrications. History is awash in such documents, and the Roman Church in particular has a long history of creating false documents. But Rosenthal’s method will not allow him to start with the assumption – the “faith presupposition,” as he calls it – that the New Testament documents are true. Rather, like any other document, they must be proved true; that is why he seeks their “explanation.”

WHI: A person can believe this without the work of the Holy Spirit, simply by being true to the craft of history.

Robbins: Not only does Rosenthal make special revelation mundane and ignore the epistemological significance of inspiration and inerrancy, he extols the power of the natural man to believe that “Jesus is in fact who he claimed to be, and that he really rose from the dead.” In doing so, he denigrates the work of the Holy Spirit. According to Rosenthal, the unregenerate man can, apart from the Holy Spirit, believe all that Jesus said about himself; he can believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior; he can believe that Jesus rose from the dead. He can, in fact, believe the Gospel, which Paul summarized in *1 Corinthians* 15: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.”

But Scripture, which Rosenthal ignores, says that “...no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (*1 Corinthians* 12:3) and “...no one can come to me unless it has been granted to him by my Father” (*John* 6:65).

One of the central doctrines of the Reformation (and of Scripture) is the total depravity of man. This means, among other things, that the natural man cannot do any good thing, especially believe the Gospel. But WHI,

through its spokesman and producer Shane Rosenthal, asserts that the natural man can indeed understand and believe the Gospel: “A person can believe this without the work of the Holy Spirit, simply by being true to the craft of history.”

WHI: What a person cannot do without the Holy Spirit, is trust in Jesus. In other words it’s possible to have knowledge and assent (i.e. the faith of demons) and still not be saved.

Robbins: This error has been refuted many times, yet many tipsy theologians keep mindlessly repeating it. Rosenthal here displays his ignorance of Christian soteriology. (Perhaps it is a good thing that soteriology is not discussed on many White Horse Inn programs, for the producer does not seem to know how a sinner is saved.) Trusting in Jesus *is* believing the Gospel; believing the Gospel and trusting Jesus are *the same thing*. It is only the Antichristian delusion that truth is personal, not propositional, that permits such utter nonsense to continue. To draw a false dichotomy between belief of the Gospel and trusting Jesus is to mangle the Gospel completely. To believe in Jesus is to believe his words. To believe his words is to believe him (see *John* 5:46-47). Jesus said, “He who believes in me has everlasting life” (*John* 6:47). The Apostle Paul wrote: “I declare to you the Gospel, which I preached to you, which you also received, and in which you stand, by which also you are saved...” (*1 Corinthians* 15:1-2). James wrote: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (1:18, 21). Peter said, “You [alone] have the words of eternal life” (*John* 6: 68). Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life” (*John* 6: 63).

Rosenthal implies (“it’s possible to have knowledge and assent – i.e. the faith of demons”), although he does not state it explicitly, that demons believe the Gospel. This flows from his assertion that no work of the Holy Spirit is needed to believe the Gospel. Furthermore, notice how Rosenthal equates – correctly this time – faith with knowledge and assent. This means that his view severs the inseparable connection between justification and faith, for demons have faith; they believe the Gospel; and they are not justified.

Now, there is no support in Scripture for these Antichristian notions. James never says demons believe the Gospel; he says demons believe in one God, that is, they are monotheists. Monotheism is not the Gospel. No demon is a Christian, as Rosenthal implies, and no demon has Christian faith. For further details about faith and justification by faith alone, Rosenthal should read *What Is Saving Faith?* by Gordon Clark.

WHI: One of the things Machen says that has always stuck with me is that men are made in such a way that it is basically impossible for them to trust with the heart what their minds believe to be untrue.

Robbins: Rosenthal attributes words to Machen that Rosenthal does not understand. The reason no one can trust with the heart what their minds believe to be untrue is

that the heart and the mind are the same thing, and belief and trust are the same thing.

WHI: Therefore, one of my tasks as the producer of the WHI, is to regularly remove those stumbling blocks from believers who struggle with doubt, or with non-Christians listening in who think what we're saying is interesting, but at the end of the day it's all a big fairy tale. So, we regularly work on the "what Christians believe (knowledge) and why we believe it" (assent)...

Robbins: "Why we believe it" is not assent. It is apologetics.

WHI: ...and leave the work of regeneration to the Holy Spirit.

Robbins: But Rosenthal has already said that a sinner can believe the Gospel without the Holy Spirit. Why does he need to regenerate anyone?

WHI: ...Thanks again, Travis, for sharing your concerns. I've enjoyed thinking through these issues in our correspondence. Much more could be said on the philosophical underpinnings to all this. I'm not with you that the Bible is a first principle.

Robbins: Finally Rosenthal makes his denial of the axiom of Christianity explicit. The Word of God, he says, is not a first principle.

WHI: It has to be read with the eyes / listened to with the ears. Thus it seems that belief in the bible rests on a prior first principle, namely that of the general reliability of sense perception, etc.

Robbins: Here he finally makes his empiricism explicit. He trusts the Bible only because he trusts his eyes first. Sensation is his first principle, not revelation. In fact, Rosenthal's theory of knowledge has no room for revelation at all – special or general. All alleged revelation must not only be judged by the "craft of history," but also mediated by the senses. There is no place in his theory of knowledge for a Word from God – no place for Christ's statement to Peter, "Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in Heaven." According to the White Horse Inn, it is only the senses that give us knowledge, either by looking at the heavens, or by reading a book. Nature has eaten up grace completely, and God cannot reveal his truth directly to men's minds. According to the White Horse Inn, flesh and blood has revealed everything to us.

The "general reliability of sense perception," even if it were true (it is not), would offer no foundation for Christianity, for if sense perception is generally reliable, then it is sometimes unreliable, and how does one tell when it is one or the other? One cannot appeal to sense perception to decide the question, for that is the very method that needs to be confirmed. By abandoning the Christian axiom of an infallible word from God, implanted, as James says, in the mind by God, the White Horse Inn has abandoned Christianity.

WHI: I also believe that we are to reason with people in an attempt to *prove* the truth of the Christian faith.

Robbins: As I have shown, here and elsewhere, Rosenthal and his empiricist friends do not know and cannot provide a definition of proof, let alone a coherent

account of the Christian faith. Their evidentialist method is theologically and philosophically bankrupt. It is bankrupt because it is pure humanism – an attempt to scale Heaven to reach God. It relies on flesh and blood. It is not a humble recognition that God must and has taken the initiative in giving us knowledge as well as salvation, and has infallibly revealed himself in propositions to men. It is man-centered, not God-centered.

WHI: I believe that's what the Apostle's [sic] were doing when they appealed to fulfilled prophecy and the fact of the resurrection (the two primary apologetic thrusts in the sermons recorded in the book of Acts). They didn't simply command belief.

Robbins: Of course they simply commanded belief: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." The rest is the content, the propositions that sinners were to believe, established by Scripture and the inspired preaching of the apostles. As for prophecy, it is an appeal to Scripture. No unbeliever saw the resurrected Christ. Thomas, who demanded empirical evidence of the resurrection, was rebuked by Jesus, and Jesus blessed those who have not seen but yet have believed.

Conclusion

The basic theological and philosophical problem with organizations such as The White Horse Inn, *Modern Reformation* magazine, Westminster Seminary, Ligonier Ministries, *Table Talk* magazine, Stand to Reason radio, Summit Ministries, and Coral Ridge Ministries is not simply their failure, but their *refusal* to be captive to the Word of God. The "Reverend Doctors" think they are smarter – or at least more widely read – than the Holy Spirit himself, and so they promote the wisdom of men, not the wisdom of Christ. The Apostle Paul's words in *1 Corinthians* and *Colossians* are the death-knell of all non-revelational theories of knowledge:

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God, for I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.... And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.... Eye has not seen, nor ear heard [empiricism is useless], nor have entered into the heart of man [rationalism is useless] the things which God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed them to us through his Spirit [only revelation yields knowledge]."

Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," alone reveals truth to men.

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