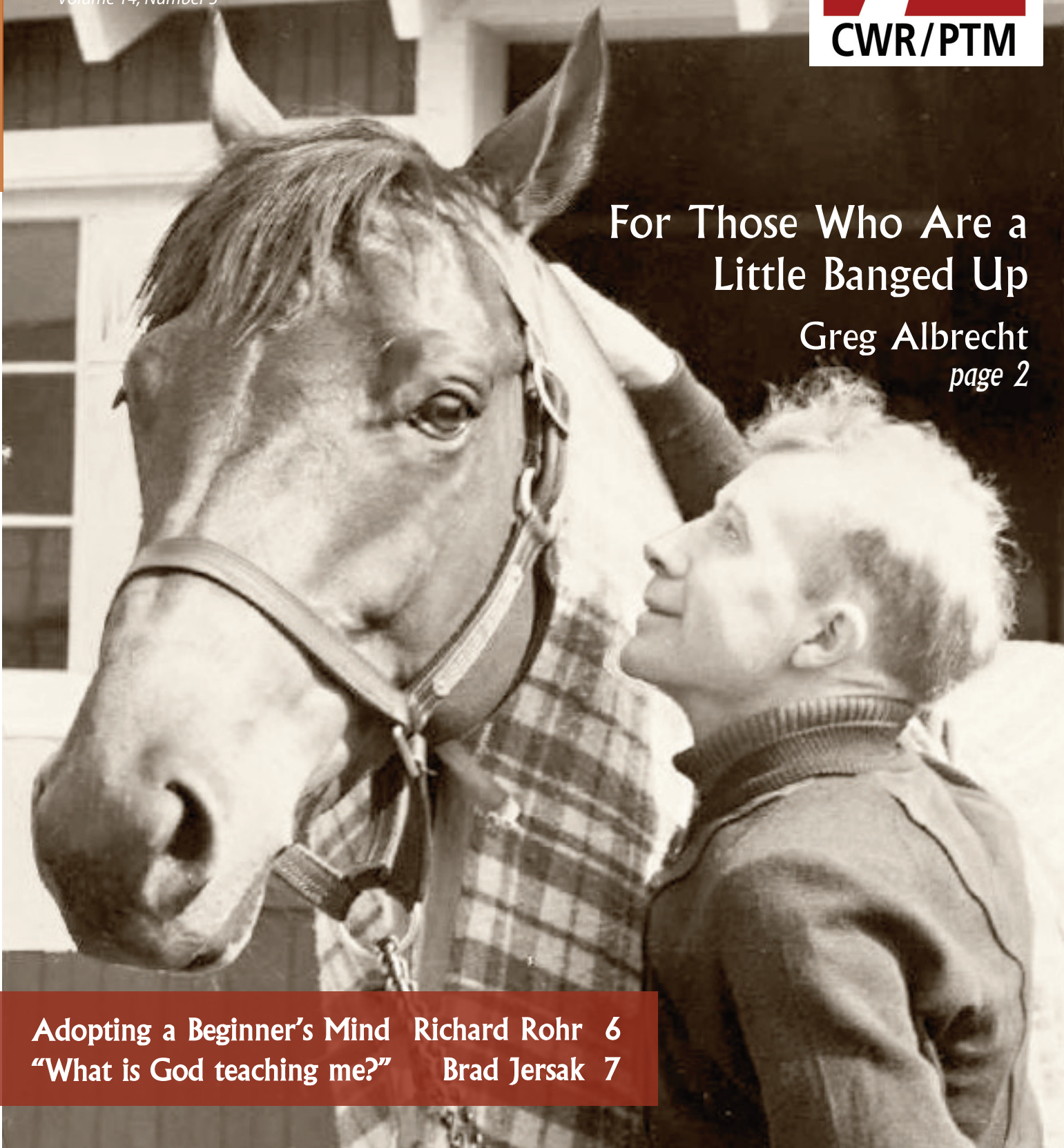


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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



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For Those Who Are a Little Banged Up

by Greg Albrecht



Seabiscuit winning the Santa Anita Handicap 1940

A LITTLE BANGED UP

In the Academy Award nominated movie “Seabiscuit” the phrase *“You don’t throw away a whole life just because he’s banged up a little”* initially refers to a horse no one wanted. Seabiscuit was a feisty, hard to handle, undersized and overlooked thoroughbred race horse with a temper—a horse with an attitude—a horse who only seemed to eat and sleep too much. No owner wanted to risk investing in such a horse.

The movie tells us about Tom Smith, a trainer who specialized in rehabilitating injured and abused horses who was hired to work for Charles Howard, played by Jeff Bridges, who was beginning to acquire a stable of racehorses.

Tom Smith sees potential in Seabiscuit and even though “Seabiscuit” has many weaknesses and many negatives Smith convinces Charles Howard

to buy him, as Smith had assured the owner, *“You don’t throw away a whole life just because he’s banged up a little.”*

They didn’t throw away Seabiscuit, and this horse eventually proved those who believed in him right, as he captured the attention of the American public in a way that few racehorses have. Seabiscuit was named American Horse of the Year in 1938. Laura Hillenbrand begins her best-selling book “Seabiscuit”—the book that was followed by the movie of the same name—describing the enormous interest and following that Seabiscuit inspired:

“In 1938, near the end of a decade of monumental turmoil, the year’s number-one newsmaker was not Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Hitler or Mussolini. It wasn’t Pope Pius XI, nor was it Lou Gehrig, Howard Hughes or Clark Gable. The subject of most newspaper column inches in 1938 wasn’t even a person. It was an undersized, crooked-leg racehorse named Seabiscuit.”

THREE MEN & A HORSE

In both the book and the movie “Seabiscuit,” three men and a horse are all *a little banged up*.

The rich owner Charles Howard had not been born into wealth—he started working in a bicycle shop. Then he became interested in cars, and started his own business, which eventually grew into one of the largest car dealerships in California.

But his success story ended when he lost his son in a tragic accident—Howard was struggling to move on with his life, despite his overwhelming grief.

The trainer Tom Smith was banged up. He was a non-conformist who did not do things like horse trainers did in those days. Tom Smith saw every horse as having potential of some kind, regardless of how banged up that horse was. Given his unorthodox methods and views, Tom Smith was definitely different and was rejected and considered inferior to other trainers.

The jockey, Red Pollard, played in the movie by Tobey Maguire, was also a person with a checkered past. As a child Red was abandoned by his parents, who left him with a horse trainer at a race track. Red had to scrap his way through life—making money through illegal boxing matches, one of which left him blind in one eye.

Red didn’t have many friends—he was an angry man who had been abandoned and he frequently got into fights. Before he was chosen as Seabiscuit’s jockey Red was far from successful as a jockey—before he joined forces with Seabiscuit, Red had one of the lowest winning percentages of any of his fellow jockeys.

But, when Charles Howard—the owner—and Tom Smith, the trainer, were looking for a jockey to ride Seabiscuit they saw the same kind of potential in this little regarded, blind-in-one

eye, scrapper of a man named Red Pollard—after all, *“You don’t throw away a life just because they’re banged up a little.”*

Seabiscuit is a story about three men and a horse—all of whom are banged up, all a little worse for wear.

Here’s how Laura Hillenbrand describes Seabiscuit in her book:

“The horse was a train wreck. He paced his stall incessantly. He broke into a lather at the sight of a saddle. He was two hundred pounds overweight and chronically tired. Seabiscuit didn’t run, he rampaged. When the rider asked him for speed, the horse slowed down. When he tried to rein him in, the horse bolted. Asked to go left, he’d dodge right; tugged right, he’d dart left.”

JESUS CAME FOR ALL WHO ARE “A LITTLE BANGED UP”

Jesus came down out of heaven—he came to be one of us, for us. He came to redeem us, to rescue us, to reconcile us. He came to the downtrodden and the rejected, the marginalized and the forgotten—the lost and the least. Jesus came for us all, and *we are all a little banged up*.



As far as God in Christ is concerned, no one is outside of his grace. No one is a throwaway. No one is beyond hope.

- You may feel like a train wreck.
- You may feel or be way overweight.
- You may be chronically tired.
- Perhaps all you want to do is eat and sleep.

You may have a history of doing all the wrong things—when God wanted you to go right, you went left, and when he wanted you to go left, you insisted on going in precisely the opposite direction.

Perhaps there have been many times in your life that can be best described as times when God would have wanted you to run, but you stopped. And perhaps there were many times in your life—perhaps right now—when it seemed God wanted you to stop, but you insisted on running away.

But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus came to this world to become one of us. Why? Because God doesn't just throw us away, even when we're a little banged up.

The gospel is not a call to all those who are the hardest workers, who build the best character, who can perform mighty religious deeds and make God

proud. The gospel insists that no human is righteous by virtue of their efforts and works. No one qualifies themselves—no one can win any spiritual race apart from the help and grace of God.

You may feel that there are so many others who are spiritual giants—so many others who seem like they have God in their hip pocket.

We are all a little banged up, but we are all equally loved and welcomed by our gracious heavenly Father.

As far as God in Christ is concerned, no one is outside of his grace. No one is a throwaway. No one is beyond hope.

Seabiscuit statue by American sculptor Hughlette ("Tex") Wheeler at Santa Anita Park racetrack. Lily Okuru, a Japanese American woman who lived on the track site when it was used as a War Relocation Camp, poses with the statue in 1942.



A THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS VERSUS A THEOLOGY OF HUMAN GLORY

Much of what passes for Christianity today is to blame for perpetuating the heretical idea that the roadmap that leads to God's love and acceptance is human performance and achievement. In contemporary North American Christendom, self-help, performance and earning God's favor are the order of the day.

So much of the evangelical message within contemporary North American Christendom amounts to a can-do, self-help message about the American Dream with just a little Jesus sprinkled on top.

The theology of glory is all about human efforts to improve, perform and perfect. The theology of glory suggests that God's interest in us, approval of us and love for us are predicated on our actions. The more we do for God, the more he will do for us, says the theology of glory. But the gospel is something altogether different. It is, as Martin Luther coined the term, the theology of the cross. The theology of glory emphasizes human efforts, self-will and the power of reason to gain God's love and acceptance.

The theology of the cross sees the Cross of Christ as the center, core and crux of what it means to be a Christ-follower. To the Philippians, Paul says "I can do all things through him who gives the strength" (Philippians 4:13). Paul tells the Romans "... we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Who we are, what we have done, and the capabilities we bring to the table—indeed his Table—are of no consequence to the love God provides by his matchless grace. Jesus came to this world—and he still comes to the hearts and lives of Christ-followers who are a little worse for wear, a little long in the tooth, who feel like they are ready for the glue factory.

But the good news is that *God doesn't just throw us away because we're a little banged up.* □

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"Theology of the Cross"

"A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it is."

— Martin Luther,
Heidelberg Disputation, 1581.



Martin Luther

"The theology of the cross directs us away from all attempts to speculate about God... The theology of the cross directs us to God in human flesh, God on the cross, God raised from the dead. To all the modern questions about what truth might be and what kind of claim truth might have on us, the God who is revealed in crib, cross, and crypt seizes us anew as we present him to those who have lost their way...."

"The theology of the cross also shows us how God restores the true identity of those whom he has called to be his children. ...the cross leads us from our old life being crucified with Christ into a new life which is raised with him."

— Robert Kolb, "What is the theology of the Cross," *Core Christianity*



Simone Weil

"The cross as a balance, as a lever. A going down, the condition of a rising up. Heaven coming down to earth raises earth to heaven. A lever..."

"When the whole universe weighs upon us there is no other counterweight possible but God himself—the true God, for in this case false gods

cannot do anything, not even

under the name of the true one. Evil is infinite in the sense of being indefinite: matter, space, time. Nothing can overcome this kind of infinity except the true infinity. That is why on the balance of the cross a body which was frail and light but which was God, lifted up the whole world. 'Give me a point of leverage and I will lift up the world.'

"This point of leverage is the cross. There can be no other. It has to be at the intersection of the world and that which is not the world. The cross is this intersection."

— Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace, 1947.*