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**FEATURE**
(Available to all logged-in subscribers; to apply for a free 30-day subscription, [click here](#))

*Calhoun, Georgia Artist Plays with Clay for His Master (feature):*
DeWitt "Old Dog" Boyd has been a working artist for years --
that's the way he supports his family. But his masterpiece may be the Folk Art Garden behind Calhoun Seventh-day Adventist church, which contains more than 50 miniature buildings, including a model of Notre Dame de Paris and tiny porcelain figures. The garden is featured on Georgia's tourism websites and is becoming a "must-see destination" in Calhoun.... (See related photos in "Folk Art Garden Miniatures.")

POETRY & THE ARTS

Folk Art Garden Miniatures (feature-related visuals): Admire photos of the intricate miniature buildings in the Folk Art Garden at the Calhoun Seventh-day Adventist church, created by DeWitt "Old Dog" Boyd and an army of volunteers. (See related feature immediately above.)

The Second Great Commandment (poetry): S M Chen ponders the importance of loving one's neighbors, and considers why it takes faith in a person's life to actually accomplish that most unnatural feat....
Survivor Advocate Objects to Rebaptism of Samuel Pipim

By AT News Team, September 7, 2014

A professional counselor who serves as an advocate for victims of clergy abuse with The Hope for Survivors, an Adventist organization, has released a statement detailing why Dr. Samuel Pipim was not properly eligible for rebaptism. She was assigned by the organization to work with one of at least three young women that Pipim has victimized to facilitate healing and speak on the victim's behalf.

The statement details Pipim's victimization of a young woman who has been given the name "Nandipa" in 2011. It states that officials of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in Botswana, where the incident happened, have accepted Nandipa's allegations as accurate because of a recorded telephone conversation in which Pipim admitted his misbehavior.

The statement was released in response to a news story in Adventist Today earlier this year which reported that an Adventist church in Columbus, Ohio, permitted a visiting minister to rebaptize Pipim while their pastor was out of the country on a mission trip. Adventist Today has received many comments on this event.

"My opposition to [his] rebaptism has nothing to do with being judgmental or unforgiving or want to 'cast the first stone,'" stated Jennifer Jill Schwirzer, a licensed family counselor in Pennsylvania and well-known Adventist writer, speaker and seminar leader. It has "everything to do with wanting to protect the integrity and reputation of my church, and protect the purity of young women the world over."

The statement points out that the Ann Arbor, Michigan, Seventh-day Adventist Church, where Pipim was disfellowshipped, and the denomination's Michigan Conference which withdrew his credentials as an ordained ministry, have not changed their view of Pipim's status. They did not approve of his rebaptism and evidently agree that he was not eligible for rebaptism.

The statement quotes Ellen G. White, a cofounder of the denomination, that "true confession is always of a specific character and acknowledges particular sins." (Steps to Christ, page 38) "From what I know, Samuel Pipim has never engaged in this work of specific confession. [And] beyond the confession he owes to the victims ... he owes to his followers an admission that he has fabricated a much more flattering picture of himself than was true." Pipim continues to operate an independent ministry, publishing books and other materials on spiritual and theological topics, and continues to be referred to by some Adventists as a source of Bible truth.

Adventist Today has published the entire statement here:

NAD Summit Seeks Educational Pathway for Pastoral Ministry

From News Release, September 11, 2014

A summit entitled “Pathways to Effective Pastoral Ministry” convened on the campus of Andrews University September 6-8, reports the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The summit's goal was to create a clearly defined educational path to the ministry for pastoral candidates.

The primary motivation for convening the summit was demographic data that shows that more than 450 Adventist pastors across North America are currently eligible for retirement. With hundreds more joining their ranks every year, a shortage of qualified pastors looms ahead.

The diverse group of thought leaders from across the North American Division gathered to discuss the need for a comprehensive plan for the recruitment and development of effective pastors across the territory.

A recent study by the Adventist World Church Headquarters revealed that while two-thirds of North American Adventist pastors have graduate degrees, 7 percent of pastors have not yet completed a college undergraduate degree. Many pastors have attended unaccredited Bible training schools that provide lay training, with an emphasis on traditional evangelism, typically lasting less than half a year. Additionally, the study showed that three in five pastors expressed a need for ongoing in-service training.

Summit attendees included administrators, ministerial leaders, pastors and educators, who made recommendations that will be presented at the North American Division Year-end Meetings.

Some recommendations include:

- Forming a pastoral council to address pastoral development
- Establishing a council of educators and ministerial leaders to coordinate learning outcomes of ministerial students
- Starting a task force to develop a strategy for pastoral recruitment

The recommendations made at the summit have no formal authority, but will be passed on to the appropriate bodies which can take action.
ADRA Teams with Four Adventist Groups in Ebola Outbreak

From the Adventist News Network, September 9, 2014

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is partnering with other Adventist organizations to provide an additional $142,000 in medical supplies as West Africa grapples with an ongoing Ebola outbreak.

ADRA announced Monday that it was teaming up with GlobalMedic to airlift $50,000 worth of supplies to Waterloo Adventist Hospital located in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

ADRA is also working with Loma Linda University, Adventist Health International, and Adventist Health Ministries to provide $92,000 worth of equipment and supplies to Cooper Adventist Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia.

More supplies will also be offered to the Liberian Health Ministry, it said in a statement. The supplies include personal protective equipment such as vinyl gloves, facemasks, isolation gowns, and isolation shelter systems.

“As we continue to respond to the Ebola outbreak, our goal is to fight the spread of the disease,” said Jonathan Duffy, president of ADRA International. “We want to protect the workers, improve the care they can provide, and educate the community. It’s critical for us to support our facilities in West Africa.”

Several weeks ago, ADRA implemented an initial $22,000 response that provided protective gear including gloves, goggles, and gowns. ADRA also purchased and delivered disinfectants such as alcohol, chlorine, bleach, and other sanitizers for use by the hospital staff.

In Sierra Leone, ADRA is providing psychological counseling and support to victims and families, training to capacitate staff and volunteers, and spreading community awareness and sensitization messages in public markets, churches, and bus stations.

The outbreak across five West African countries has killed more than 2,100 people this year, according to the World Health Organization. The WHO last month declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. The affected countries are Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, and Senegal.

*The Adventist News Network (ANN) is the official news service of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.*
Webinar on How to Increase Giving in Your Local Church

By AT News Team, September 11, 2014

An online event will provide leadership development for lay leaders in congregations around the world on the weekend of September 27-28. Leadership Webinars is a series produced by the Center for Creative Ministry, a resource center affiliated with the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The topic in September is "How to Increase Giving in Your Local Church."

Each Webinar includes about 50 minutes of a presentation and then an open period of time to answer questions or assist with problem-solving for local leaders. Each is presented twice, once on Sabbath afternoon and once on Sunday morning. The second presentation is a live event, not a recording from the first session, but the two cover the same outline. They are not part one and part two.

The Sabbath afternoon session is scheduled for 4 p.m. Eastern time and the Sunday morning session is scheduled for 11 a.m. Eastern time. You will need to calculate the actual time based on where you are located relative to the Eastern time zone in the United States and Canada.

The September presentation will include information from research conducted last year with focus groups and a survey across North America asking about the motivations for giving among members of the Adventist denomination. The presenter will be Pastor Monte Sahlin, who retired earlier this year after 44 years in the Adventist clergy. He is known as an author and research professional, as well as a teacher and preacher. He has served at all levels of the denomination.

In order to participate, a local group or individual must pre-register with the Webinar series. Those who have already pre-registered earlier in 2014 do not need to register again and will automatically receive an Email with an access link.

To register for the Sabbath afternoon series, go to: www2.gotomeeting.com/register/413811322 To register for the Sunday morning series, go to: www2.gotomeeting.com/register/774975762
Villagers in India Return to Hindu Faith from Adventist

By AT News Team, September 9, 2014

A group of local residents in the rural village of Asroi, 110 miles south of New Delhi, India, left the Adventist Church and returned to the Hindu religion in a “purification ceremony” two weeks ago. The incident has resulted in media coverage in India and complaints about “forced reconversion by Hindu fundamentalists,” as well as a story published by a Catholic news service that blamed the Adventist Church for not meeting the needs of those involved.

"A number of Christian community leaders suspected the conversions had been carried out by the pro-Hindu organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangththe" (RSS), reported the Ecumenical News service. Adventist leaders in the region "have appealed to Indian authorities to investigate the possible forced reconversion," stated the Adventist News Network (ANN), the denomination's official news service.

Forced conversions are illegal in India. "We have made a petition to the local civic authority and to ... higher levels for an inquiry," ANN quoted Pastor T. P. Kurian, communication director for the Southern Asia Division of the Adventist denomination.

A team of four Adventist ministers visited the village last week, according to ANN. They "found no evidence that the church [building] had been disturbed" despite reports in the news media in India stating that the Christian cross had been replaced by an idol of the Hindu god Shiva, including a photo of two men holding a poster of Shiva.

"The idol of Shiva was not found there, and the church [building] has not been turned into a [Hindu] temple," the team's report was quoted by ANN. "The church building is kept under police surveillance."

The history of the Asroi Seventh-day Adventist Church as recounted by ANN is that in 2001 a total of 33 villagers became Adventists. "Attendance dipped in the following years [and] two families stopped attending in 2007, leaving 20 people at Sabbath services. Only five to seven people were attending regularly" when recent events unfolded in the last couple of weeks.

The story published by UCA News, the Catholic news service in India, on Friday (September 5) said that the group claimed that they were not pressured by Hindu fundamentalists. "Instead they blamed neglect by their church, the Seventh Day Adventists, for their decision to convert." The story quotes a 30-year-old man named Ram Pal. He says that the group had been promised by the Adventist evangelist that they would be able to move out of the social prejudice against them as low-caste "untouchables" if they became Christians and increase their income, get education for their children and access to health care. After a number of years these outcomes had not developed, so the group met and decided to go back to being Hindu.

Not only were they still seen as low-caste in social status, they were no longer eligible for specific government benefits that are provided to low-caste Hindus, according to UCA News. "Pal said that despite becoming Christians, they had been following Hindu traditions in their homes for quite some time."

UCA News also quotes a Seventh-day Adventist pastor named Habil Gyan. Adventist Today could not confirm that a person by this name is credentialed as a pastor by the denomination and one statement in the UCA News story really
undermines its credibility; "Gyan said the church used to host Sunday Mass regularly." It is highly unlikely that an Adventist minister would make such a statement, although it is possible that the reporter totally misunderstood what was said.

The story does reveal the difficulties of Adventist evangelism and church planting in a complex social and religious context such as exists in India. "This may be an example of the old missionary problem of 'rice Christians.' It sounds like it may be possible," a veteran Adventist administrator told Adventist Today. "Rice Christians" is a reference to a time in the 19th century when there was famine in China and Christian missionaries distributed relief supplies of food to converts. For a period of time there were many conversions, then when the famine subsided, many people dropped out of the churches. This is a story often referenced in missiology textbooks.
Dear Mr. Hanson,

I have a confession to make. I've been reading your Adventist Today blog since the Patricia Moleski days. I guess that makes me a fan. Anyway, since our intellectual instincts seem to be in sync—we don't believe in a literal seven-day creation and a worldwide flood—and we both claim to be Adventists, albeit real “lefties,” shouldn't both of us come out of the closet and ask to have our names dropped from the church books? According to our General Conference President, Ted Wilson, speaking at an educators conference in Utah,

“If one does not accept the recent six-day creation understanding, then that person is actually not a 'Seventh-day' Adventist, since the seventh-day Sabbath would become absolutely meaningless historically and theologically, and most of our Biblically based doctrines centered in Christ and His authoritative voice would become meaningless as well… When we indicate we are Seventh-day Adventists, we stand for a literal creation and global flood.”

Sincerely,

A Fan

Dear Fan,

Thank you for your fanship and your question. While I wouldn’t presume to answer that question for you, here is my answer. I plan to ignore Ted. I will tender my resignation when my local church requests it. After all, Ted is only a member of the Adventist Church. He isn’t an Adventist Pope. His thoughts and ideas are not inerrant. And his willful ignorance regarding the “seventh-day” on a round planet, not to mention astronomy and history, is self-revelatory when he goes on to claim that “the actual seventh day has never been lost. It can be documented through history and through astronomy.”

Anyway, most of my fellow church members shrug off his pronouncements, and if he regards National Geographic* as a publication designed to subvert the minds of the faithful, that’s his personal business.

Sincerely,

Andy Hanson

Assurance of Salvation

by Glen Striemer, September 9, 2014  You hear it spoken across the land on a weekly basis, “We don’t believe in once saved, always saved. We need to die daily.” (1 Corinthians 15:31) This combination of thought undermines the good news of the gospel and is actually quite a prideful statement, in that by my dying daily to self I somehow manage to maintain my good status as being saved. This is why the doctrine of predestination was invented in the first place, because Calvin and his followers couldn’t accept that by doing you were achieving salvation. They knew that only a minority were going to enter into heavenly places, so they created a doctrine whereby only a few were selected by God for salvation, regardless of their performance. Luther’s followers, on the other hand, believed that the “just shall live by faith,” the only problem being that they believed it was by our own faith that we manufacture salvation. Here the religious world sat for centuries, until the year 1888 in a church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the world was re-introduced to righteousness by faith, the faith of Jesus. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is often referred to as a “movement of destiny.” It cannot be because we believe in the seventh-day Sabbath, for that was taught to us by our friends, the Seventh-day Baptists; it cannot be because of baptism by immersion, for that was taught to us by the early Amish Mennonites; it cannot be because we pay tithes, for we have the Jews to thank for this truth. We are a church of destiny because we introduced the final stepping stone in the recovering of truths long lost since Pentecost. We were not supposed to reject this message which is found within the one unique pillar of Adventism, the heavenly sanctuary message. Dr. Waggoner was challenged from the audience by one of his hearers who cried out, “Are you preaching the doctrine of universalism!” To which E.J. Waggoner calmly and confidently replied, “I am preaching what the Bible says.”

As long as angels hold back the winds of strife, we are not saved by our understanding of doctrine, no matter how pressingly beautiful it is. This is easily proven when we read the dynamic prayer of Jesus found in John 17. Jesus tells His readers that He is one with His disciples and they are one with Him. At that particular moment in history, Christ’s disciples by today’s standards were not even candidates for baptism. They did not understand the cross or the resurrection, and they certainly did not understand the 2300-day prophecy found in Daniel, nor the eternal kingdom to come.

When we utter the words “We don’t believe in once saved, always saved,” it is as though these thoughts are directed at some huge religious movement whose followers do believe these things. One of my great surprises in 25 years of colporteur ministry was that I couldn’t find a single soul who actually believed in predestination. I know they are out there somewhere, perhaps hiding in the Primitive Baptist Church, but for all intents and purposes, that ship has sailed. A quick Google search shows that modern Baptists, be they Southern Baptists or mainstream, believe that everyone has a chance at salvation. Our continuing argument might have found an audience to debate back in the Middle Ages but not so much today. The only purpose this phrase serves today is to remind our own people that salvation is not merely historical but something that needs continual renewing, thus the tagalong verse of how we need to die daily. With this type of thinking comes the lack of assurance of salvation the Bible speaks so plainly about. Probably its greatest single effect is seen in the never-ending surveys amongst our youth, which reveal that academy and university students are quite uncertain about their salvation status.

If we look at salvation through the eyes of the Jewish scholar Apostle Paul, we grasp the Jewish concept that all Jews are one. It has been said that if you kill or hurt one Jew you do it to all. Paul capitalized on this thinking, expanding it into gospel terms his Jewish hearers understood all too well. “Therefore as by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men to condemnation” (Romans 5:18). Herein is defined the great corporate act of Adam in condemning the
world to damnation. Adam's act affected all men, in spite of the fact that none were present or partakers of it. You couldn't choose to accept or reject what Adam did, for it came upon all men. Over the years many have deduced this Bible concept as being grossly unfair, especially when it brought along death as its penalty. But Paul doesn't leave his hearers to lack faith in an unjust God, for he brings us to the other side of the great teeter totter of life. "By the righteousness of One, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18). Again, we were not present, nor did we have any part to play, and like Adam's, it was a corporate decision which came upon all men without a chance to accept or reject its results. Sometimes it's hard to believe but a murderer (Saul of Tarsus) or heathen (Luke, the Greek physician) stands with a corporate justification of life status of which they must either fall on their face and believe in, or consider it not worthwhile to believe in. At some point there is a line that is crossed (which only God knows) called the unpardonable sin, which grieves away the Holy Ghost's influence in getting us to believe the good news. Unfortunately, most of the world chooses to not believe, and this is evidenced everywhere by their body of unbelief work manifested in unsavoury, selfish, cruel, evil deeds hoisted upon the innocent by their diabolic hand. For the small minority who choose to believe, as Abram did, God's words remain steadfast: "He believed in the Lord and He counted it unto him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

There is absolutely zero merit earned when we accept Christ. We cannot receive justification of life when we accept Christ, for how can "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8) be sacrificed every time a soul repents and comes to Jesus? The Lamb was slain spiritually in Eden and reaffirmed at great risk to God in a physical manifestation in sinful, carnal flesh at Calvary. In God's eyes this was a singular act of sacrifice, not a dual one. It was the faith of God in action. If you doubt a realistic sacrifice in Eden, then we must ask how Enoch, Elijah and Moses ended up in heaven before Calvary? Our only conclusion – there is one way of salvation for all time. God did, and we believe – that is justification by our faith.

Once we've established where our salvation comes from, finding assurance of salvation is easy. You may have heard this phrase mentioned from the pen of inspiration, "There is not one in ten worthy to be saved." Often, the "one in ten" gets expanded to include "not one in twenty." And the speakers seem to quote this statement with a badge of pride. You can be certain they do not include themselves in the lost 19 while they pity the condition of their hearers. To appreciate Ellen White's comment, let's view it in context. In the Bible writings, holy men of old were moved by the Holy Ghost to pen their thoughts, using the vernacular of the day. A classic example is found in the book of Daniel, where the king found Daniel and his three friends to be ten times better than his own wise men when it came to knowledge, due to their vegetarian diet. (Daniel 1:20) This expression drives home the writer's point of emphasis but in reality it is physically impossible for a genius to be ten times smarter than even an imbecile. Again, the furnace prepared for the three Hebrew worthies being heated seven times hotter than previous is again physically impossible but the point is vividly made how hot these flames were. Likewise, Mrs. White, whom we love to quote verbatim, line upon line, expresses her utter frustration with the ministry of her day who were treating this message with carelessness and flippancy in the light of the soon appearing of Jesus. It is not a yardstick on today's congregations that only one in every ten or twenty is fit to be saved. This line of thought is not Biblical when it comes to believers faithfully worshipping on Sabbaths across the world. It does create a mindset of trying to manufacture a better performance, which is destructive and discouraging, not to mention hopeless. No wonder many youth conclude, "Why bother to try, if only 5% are going to make it anyway, especially those whom I look up to as being saints? Against those stacked odds I might as well live it up now."

Because we are eternally tied into the Lamb from before the foundation of the world, we are also tied into His one sacrifice in matters of salvation. The Old Covenant way is to continually offer up sacrifices to ensure a saving state. But Jesus "needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice … for this He did once when He offered up Himself …" (Hebrews 7:27). Jesus entered in once into the Holy Place having obtained eternal redemption for us …" (Hebrews 9:12). Nor yet shall He offer Himself often … for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world, but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself … so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:26,28). The New English Bible puts it plainly that Christ "bore the burden of men's sins."
“But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God … For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us … by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10: 12, 14-15, 10).

Our sanctification is tied into this one-time offering of Christ, and even though our personal sanctification (or performance) is the work of a lifetime, the act of salvation sanctification is a one-time act in Christ. For us to doubt salvation, to regard “I die daily” as meaning that I need to renew my salvation on a daily basis just because I don't believe in once saved, always saved, is to enter into an old covenant experience. However, "a new covenant … hath made the first old" (Hebrews 8:13). There is “a new and living way, which Jesus hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh (sarx, which is sinful flesh). “All their sins and iniquities I will remember no more” because “there is no more offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10: 17,18)

The time is well past to graduate from the foot of Sinai, where “all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the Lord hath said we will do … and be obedient” (Exodus 24: 3,8). That their intention was sincere there can be no doubt; that their performance failed time and time again, there can also be no doubt. We need to get to the New Covenant place where we “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, . . . having . . . boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10: 22,19). To the comers in ancient days it was a blasphemous thought for anyone to consider going into the holiest who was not a high priest. In New Covenant times, if we consider that our sanctification is as much a part of the free gift which came upon all men as is our salvation, then there is no room for works-oriented thinking, other than simply to please our Lord for His goodness and mercy by the holy life we choose to live. We can go boldly where no Old Covenant sort would dare to go because “ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)
Once upon a time, (seems like a million years ago), I sat on my bed on a June morning, dreading the day as I rarely had dreaded any day. Later that morning, I would go before a judge and agree to have my marriage dissolved. I didn’t want it. I had fought it with all that was within me. I had lost. I pulled out my devotional book, *Springs in the Desert*, and opened to the day’s date. This is what I found:

A Red Sea Place

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?
Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene
Till the night of your fear is gone;
He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,
When He says to your soul "Go on."

And His hand will lead you through - clear through -
Ere the watery walls roll down,
No foe can reach you, no wave can touch,
No mightiest sea can drown;
The tossing billows may rear their crests,
Their foam at your feet may break,
But over their bed you shall walk dryshod
In the path that your Lord will make.

In the morning watch, ‘neath the lifted cloud,
You shall see but the Lord alone,
When He leads you on from the place of the sea,
To a land that you have not known;
And your fears shall pass as your foes have passed,
You shall no more be afraid;
You shall sing His praise in a better place,
A place that His hand has made.
Annie Johnson Flint

I couldn’t believe my eyes. They were so full of tears I wasn’t sure…but when I wiped them, there the words still stood on the page, as if God had just then sat down and written them for me.
I pulled my autoharp to me and came up with a tune on the spot. When I later shared it with my dear friend, Patricia
White, she added a short chorus:

He says, “Go on, go on down into the sea,
I will bring you, bring you out on the other side free.

She later recorded the song on one of her albums, and it went on to bless others. (One of these days, I'll put it on
YouTube, or something, so you can hear it, though it would be better to hear Pat sing it!)

In the meantime, I did get through that day. Because, God is always able to make a way, no matter what impossible
sea you have to cross.
Folk Art Garden Miniatures

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2687/poetry-the-arts/visual-arts/folk-art-garden-miniatures

Photos by DeWitt Boyd
Submitted 9/10/14 by Debonnaire Kovacs

Here are some of the wonderful miniature buildings in the Folk Art Garden at the Calhoun Seventh-day Adventist church, created by DeWitt “Old Dog” Boyd and an army of volunteers. To learn more, see the feature, Calhoun Georgia Artist “Plays with Clay” for His Master
Folk Art Garden Miniatures

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The Second Great Commandment

http://www.atodayarchive.org/article/2685/poetry-the-arts/poetry-prose/the-second-great-commandment

by S M Chen
Submitted Sept. 10, 2014

The first great commandment of Holy Writ is to “love the Lord thy God” with heart, soul, strength and mind (Luke 10:27). And the second, like unto it, is to love “thy neighbor as thyself” (same verse).

As with the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, it seems so much easier, at times, to follow the first. Yet Jesus admonished, if we cannot love our brother (for we are all His children, are we not?), whom we have seen, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?

There have been numerous attempts in the secular sector to illustrate the importance of the second commandment.

James Leigh Hunt, in the short poem, “Abou Ben Adhem,” deals with it thusly:

...“What writest thou?” - the vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, ‘The names of those who love the Lord.’
‘And is mine one?’ said Abou. ‘Nay, not so,’
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, ‘I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.’

“The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.”

Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian novelist, became a Christian in his later years, and wrote a number of morality tales. Among them was one called “Where Love Is, God Is.” A moving short story, it may be found in English translation here:

In brief, it relates the story of a cobbler who, in his profound grief over the deaths of his wife and children, relinquished God. A pilgrim convinced the cobbler that he should live for God and not question God’s will. The cobbler bought a Bible and became devout. Soon he thought he heard the voice of God (or was it a dream? he wasn’t sure) telling him He would pay a visit the next day. While waiting for God to arrive, the cobbler interacted with a number of different people, including a man (whom the cobbler invited in for a warm drink), a young woman with an inadequately dressed baby (to whom the cobbler gave clothes and money), and a young boy who was stealing from an older lady (the cobbler intervened and showed them both compassion).
That night the cobbler wondered why God had not visited him. He was then reminded of the three people to whom he had shown love, and suddenly realized that God had visited after all.

While prominent figures in Christianity (e.g. St. Francis of Assisi, Father Damien, Mother Teresa) seemingly followed the second commandment in their lives pursuant to the first, perhaps it is also possible to, in practicing the second great commandment, more fully exemplify the first.

There are, of course, individuals and groups that practice the second commandment without necessarily being Christian (or religious, for that matter). Conversely, there are those who lay claim to practicing the first great commandment, but fail abysmally in keeping the second. Much mischief and harm have been caused by this latter group, which fostered the Crusades and the Inquisition as well as countless pogroms. And Christ was crucified by those who professed to be keepers of the first commandment.

As John Danforth (priest, ambassador, senator) put it, “Plenty of kind, decent, caring people have no religious beliefs, and they act out of the goodness of their hearts.”

But, if Jeremiah’s take on the human condition is as true today as it was when he lived, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9). 

So it may be reasonable to assume that, as a friend expressed it, “Goodness comes from God.” If that be true, the people of whom Danforth wrote may indeed profess to have no religious beliefs, but they have yet allowed something of the Divine to touch their lives, and, like Abou Ben Adhem, they love their fellow man.

The world is a better place because of them.