

C O L L E G E A N D U N I V E R S I T Y  
**DIALOGUE**

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The enigma  
of evil

Searching for  
the center of  
adventist theology

Adam and Eve:  
Lessons from  
the old story

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## ESSAYS



### THE ENIGMA OF EVIL

Evil is an intruder into God's perfect creation. We use the term fallen to describe the situation of humanity after they used their freedom of choice to do evil, and we use the term sin to denote the state of human beings, who are separated from God. We can fight against the consequences of this situation, but escaping them is not an option.

*by Roberto Badenas*



### SEARCHING FOR THE CENTER OF ADVENTIST THEOLOGY

Biblical sacrifice is not to be understood as a bribe. It is public and transparent and involves clearly defined participants. It has to be this way since it is an extension (or a dimension) of the Great Controversy, where a public challenge to God's justice and love required a public divine answer.

*by Gerald A. Klingbeil*



### ADAM AND EVE: LESSONS FROM THE OLD STORY

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TOM DE BRUIN



As aliens in a strange land, we as Christians are called upon to live honorable and morally upright lives so that people will glorify God, and so that we will fulfill our mission to those around us.

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# LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN AN ALIEN CULTURE

**W**hen I was 12, my parents decided to emigrate. We left the safe environment of the country of my birth and moved halfway around the world. It was a big change for me on many levels.

After swimming a final time in the sea, we boarded a plane in hot summer weather and landed in a frozen world. We had exchanged summer for winter. The next day I went to a new school, feeling liberated at not having to wear a school uniform, but alienated because I did not speak or understand a word of the foreign language my classmates and teachers used.

The biggest change, however, was a religious one. Growing up in South Africa, I went to an Adventist school on weekdays and an Adventist church on Sabbaths. Almost everyone I knew was Adventist. In the Netherlands, suddenly I was the only Adventist around. In fact, in our entire city we were the only Adventist family. Suddenly religious life was very different. My Adventist identity, something that had always given me a feeling of safety, suddenly had become something that made me alien.

### EARLY CHRISTIANS

Recently I taught a postgraduate seminar on the short letters at the end of the New Testament: the so-called Catholic Epistles. These little books are often overlooked in the church, as we tend to focus on the “important” letters like those of Paul. It is hard to find books written about these shorter letters, which is strange when we consider that one of the foundations of the Reformation was *Tota Scriptura* (the whole of Scripture).

This lack of emphasis is unfortunate, because these letters give us insights into living the Christian life that are different from those in other New Testament Epistles. They are focused on how to live a moral life, based on our theological convictions. So, how does the reality of our life relate to Christ’s already-achieved triumph over dark spiritual powers? The first letter of Peter tries to answer that. How does our life, with all its woes, relate to Jesus’ soon return, which always seems to take longer than the believers would like? James discusses how Jesus’s “new commandment” to love one another should inform our daily lives. Read First John, where love is linked to the confession of Christ. Does God’s grace mean we can do whatever we like, as we will be forgiven anyway? Not at all, explains Jude.

These are small books, often forgotten, which focus on the reality of living a Christian life. While all these aspects are useful for us, one of them struck a particular chord with me in the light of my own experiences: First Peter’s discussion of aliens and strangers. For someone who was an alien and a stranger for most of my teens, this letter really resonates.

### ALIENS AND STRANGERS

First Peter addresses God’s chosen: “the exiles” (1 Peter 1:1, NRSV).<sup>\*</sup> This is a word (and theme) that occurs regularly throughout the book. Traditionally, the concept of “exiles” has been understood metaphorically. We are all exiles here on Earth. More recently, theologians have noticed that Peter was probably first and foremost being literal. The first Christians were exiles. Their new-found religion had made them aliens in their own land, strangers among friends. In fact, reading “exiles” metaphorically trivializes the religious experience of the first Christians as socially and politically oppressed.

For us modern-day believers, many similarities can be drawn to the social and political contexts of the early Christians. While there is much variation between countries worldwide, Christians—and certainly Adventists—are generally a minority. Even the historically Christian countries are becoming more and more secular. As Christians, we often are, as I was as an Adventist in my teens, strangers.

### ADVICE FOR STRANGERS

Peter’s advice to exiles is very interesting. While most of Peter’s letters revolve around this theme, in the second chapter of his second Epistle, Peter gets to the meat of his message. He writes: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge” (1 Peter 2:11, 12).

Peter’s message is immediate and to the point. We Christians, as aliens and exiles, should live honorable lives. The reason is simple: not because God will judge us, not because of the Ten Commandments, not because Jesus told us to love our neighbors. All of these are important, but for Peter as he introduces living the Christian life, something else is much more important. We should live honorable lives *so that* people will glorify God. We should live a good life because we have a mission to those around us.

Later, Peter takes up this theme again. This is a very difficult piece of Scripture. Peter writes: “Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh. For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God’s approval” (1 Peter 2:18–20). Taking this passage at face value, a modern reader might well be horrified. Slavery is a terrible evil, and calling slaves to suffer honorably is a terrible thing to read in the Bible. Indeed, this passage is often taken by atheists to show why Christianity cannot be good.

“Remaining true, living honorably, being an example is the best way for us to be witness to those around.”

THAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.



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However, reading this passage in its context, and taking more time to mull over what is being said, gives a different story. Peter is worried about the downtrodden in society: exiles, strangers, slaves, women. He speaks to those who are suffering unjustly. Maybe they suffer in terrible ways, like the slaves do, and maybe they suffer somewhat less horrifically. Peter cannot change their lot; he cannot stop their suffering. But he can keep them focused on what is important. And as such, these examples function as models for all of us—even though, in general, we are better off. If slaves can live honorably despite their great suffering, surely we can live honorably with our lesser difficulties.

This does not mean we shouldn't stand up against injustice. Of course Christians should. The Old Testament prophets are clear about this. But, while society takes its time trying to find ways to solve inequality, we have to get on with our lives. The slaves to whom

Peter was writing were probably born slaves and would die slaves. They could not do much about that, but they *could* live honorably. They *could* show that Christians are different. They *could* be a witness.

Every person, through his or her life, can be a witness. Not necessarily in what he or she says, but in what he or she does. Slaves can suffer in deference, so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 2:19). Wives can accept the authority of their husbands so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 3:1). Everyone can live honorably, so that others may see their actions and may glorify God (1 Peter 2:12). We aliens can live the Christian life as a witness to all around.

### SUFFERING ALIENS CHANGE THE WORLD

I introduced First Peter as a book that discusses how the reality of our life relates to Christ's triumph over evil. This is a reality where others and we suffer unjustly: as aliens, as strangers, as exiles, as slaves, as the downtrodden. Peter shows us the power of a good life despite suffering: that it is *precisely* the aliens who can witness through honorable lives. But we needn't take Peter's word for it, because Peter is not done with his argument. He continues with the ultimate example, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:21–23).

Living honorably, despite suffering, is not just our lot. Jesus lived and died that same lot. Our Messiah's suffering has secured our place with God in the new creation, and in a similar way, our suffering can help others in this creation and the next. Remaining true, living honorably, being an example is the best way for us to be witness to those around. *That* is the Christian life. 🙏

\*All Scripture texts in this article are quoted from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

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