



# JESUS WANTS TO SAVE CHRISTIANS

A MANIFESTO FOR THE CHURCH IN EXILE



JESUS WANTS TO SAVE CHRISTIANS INTRODUCTION ■  
**AIR PUFFERS AND RUBBER GLOVES**



The first family was dysfunctional.

At least, that's the picture painted by the storyteller in the book of Genesis.

The first son, Cain, was angry with the other first son, Abel, because "the LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor."<sup>1</sup>

Cain said to his brother, "Let's go out to the field." And when they went, Cain killed Abel.

According to the story, Cain "worked the soil" while Abel "kept flocks." One was a farmer, the other was a shepherd.

A farmer is settled.

A farmer has chosen a piece of land and settled there because he's decided that this land can best support his crops. He has a strong sense of boundaries – this land, the land that he lives on and farms, is his land.

A shepherd is nomadic.

A shepherd goes wherever there is food for his flock. A shepherd wanders from place to place. A shepherd doesn't have a strong sense of boundaries, because he sees all land as a possible spot for him to stop and feed his flock.

It wouldn't take long for the shepherd and his flock to cross onto the property of the farmer. And that would raise the question, Whose land is it, anyway?

This question would have many dimensions – economic, political, religious, social – let alone the personal aspects of ownership and property and progress



and wealth. The story of these two first sons is actually a story about progress, innovation, and the inevitable forward movement of human civilization.<sup>2</sup>

This Genesis account reflects the transition that was occurring in the time and place in which this story was first told. A seismic shift was occurring as human society transitioned from a pastoral, nomadic orientation to an agricultural one. This was a huge change that did not come without a lot of strife.

And, occasionally, murder.

As a result of the murder, the text says, “Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”<sup>3</sup>

East of Eden.

There is a place called Eden, a paradise, a state of being in which everything is in its right place. A realm where the favor and peace of God rest on everything.

And Cain is not there. He’s east of there.

And he’s not only east of Eden, but in chapter 4 of the book of Genesis, the text says that he was “building a city.”<sup>4</sup>

It’s not just that he’s east of where he was created to live, but he’s actually settling there, building a city, putting down roots. The land of his wandering has become the location of his home. And then several chapters later, the Bible says that the whole world had one language and a common speech “as people moved eastward.”<sup>5</sup>

The writer, or writers, of Genesis keeps returning to this eastward metaphor,<sup>6</sup> insisting that something has gone terribly wrong with humanity, and that from the very beginning humans are moving in the wrong direction.<sup>7</sup>



God asks Adam, “Where are you?”<sup>8</sup>

And the answer is, of course, “East.”

East of where he’s supposed to be. East of how things are meant to be.



There is a new invention at the airport. Before we board our plane, we have to go through security. Many of us have had the joy of standing there in our socks, with our belt off, desperately searching our pockets for anything metal that could set off the detector and cause us to be subjected to the wand, a hand-held device that is passed over the body, beeping when it detects anything made of metal. The wand is difficult enough, but when the person using it is wearing rubber gloves . . . it just doesn’t help the experience, does it?

One of us, after being selected for a random security check, was asked with a straight face by a Transportation Safety Administration official, “Would you like me to give you a full-body pat down here? Or we could step into a private room off to the side, if you’d find that preferable.”

But enough of our traumatic airport flashbacks. There’s a new invention at the security checkpoint called the air puffer. It’s only for people who have been “randomly” selected for extra security measures. The air puffer is about the size of a phone booth. We step into it, it makes a low buzzing sound, and then it shoots bursts of air all over our bodies. A green light then comes on, the glass doors in front open, and we’re free to exit. We are given no instructions and receive no explanation as to why exactly being shot with little bursts of air all over one’s body makes the world a safer place. Apparently, it has something to do with detecting the presence of explosive substances.

What is most frightening about the air puffer is not the unexpected puffs of



air. What is most frightening is that we do it. Thousands of us each day step in, feel the breeze, wait for the light, exit, and then set off in search of our belt and shoes. Because if we were to protest, we would immediately be escorted into “a private room to the side” for who knows what.

And besides, we have to catch our plane.

Now, as we leave the air puffer, collect our belongings, and make our way toward the gate our plane is departing from, the first thing we hear is a television. There are many of them, all over the terminal. They are set to the same channel, a news show that is custom-made for airports. The length of the segment before it repeats is about the average length of time a person sits waiting for their plane. This news channel gives up-to-date pictures and reports on news from around the world, including the latest word from the government on just how safe or unsafe it is to travel.

Which takes us back to the air puffer. On the side of the air puffer is a logo. A large logo of a very well-known, very large American company that has made hundreds of millions of dollars over the years selling convenient, time-saving devices for every aspect of our lives. And now, in addition to toasters and irons and refrigerators, they manufacture and sell air puffers.

Keeping us safe is very, very profitable.

Which takes us back to the televisions, where a reporter is showing us pictures of a brand-new plane the American military has just unveiled that cost fifty billion dollars to create.<sup>9</sup> This plane can do what no other plane can do – it can hover like a helicopter and then fly like a jet – and this particular television network has been granted the privilege of taking the first civilian flight aboard this wonder of technology and innovation.

Which takes us back to something that’s next to the air puffer: a fully equipped



security checkpoint that is not in use and has been roped off. It is brand-new and next to it is a sign describing the advanced features of its new machines and how this is the security checkpoint of the future. It even has little walls with detectors in them that you walk between so you don't have to take off your shoes.

Being safe is getting more convenient by the moment.

Which takes us back to the television. The reporter is now talking about a recent debate among government leaders concerning funding for homeland security. Various members are arguing for and against certain sums for increased security measures, and somewhere in the course of the broadcast it is stated that the war America is fighting is on its way to costing a trillion dollars. For purposes of the debate, a distinction is being made between the cost of the war *over there*, and the cost of ensuring our safety *here*. The nearly trillion dollars is for the effort *over there*, and there's another budget for our security *here*, and it is an equally mind-blowing amount of money. When we hear it, we think, *That's a lot of air puffers and rubber gloves*.

Which takes us back to the air puffer. The air puffer that we paid for with our tax dollars. To keep us safe, with our tax dollars, from the people we're fighting. To hear about every day on the news we're paying for with our consumption of the products advertised during the commercial breaks from the news – the news that tells us how unsafe the world is.

Which takes us back to the television, to a report they are now doing about how gas prices are going to go up again and global supplies of oil simply aren't what they're used to be.

We hear this news as we walk by an advertisement on the wall for a large American-made automobile. It seats seven people and has a television. This vehicle does not get very many miles to the gallon.



One can't help but wonder, Is there an enemy of America, hiding somewhere in a cave, laughing? Already plotting some other way to harm us that will have nothing to do with airplanes?

Or are they plotting nothing?

Because they realize that whatever they might do next, it would be nowhere as destructive as what we're already doing to ourselves.

We are east of Eden.

Something is not right.<sup>10</sup>

The Germans have a word for this. They call it *ursprache* (oor-shprah-kah). *Ursprache* is the primal, original language of the human family.<sup>11</sup> It's the language of paradise that still echoes in the deepest recesses of our consciousness, telling us that things are out of whack deep in our bones, deep in the soul of humanity. Something about how we relate to one another has been lost. Something is not right with the world.

Back to the television in the airport. On the news are sound bites from a speech by the president of the United States. He's on the deck of an aircraft carrier, proclaiming victory in a recent military effort. Not only was the mission accomplished, according to the leader of the world's only superpower, but American forces are now occupying this Middle Eastern country until peace can be fully realized within its borders.

This puts a Christian in an awkward place.

Because Jesus was a Middle Eastern man who lived in an occupied country and was killed by the superpower of his day.



The Roman Empire, which put Jesus on an execution stake, insisted that it was bringing peace to the world through its massive military might, and anybody who didn't see it this way just might be put on a cross. Emperor Caesar, who ruled the Roman Empire, was considered the "Son of God," the "Prince of Peace," and one of his propaganda slogans was "peace through victory."<sup>12</sup>

The insistence of the first Christians was that through this resurrected Jesus Christ, God has made peace with the world. Not through weapons of war but through a naked, bleeding man hanging dead on an execution stake. A Roman execution stake. Another of Caesar's favorite propaganda slogans was "Caesar is Lord." The first Christians often said "Jesus is Lord." For them, Jesus was another way, a better way, a way that made the world better through sacrificial love, not coercive violence.<sup>13</sup>

So when the commander in chief of the most powerful armed forces humanity has ever seen quotes the prophet Isaiah from the Bible in celebration of military victory,<sup>14</sup> we must ask, Is this what Isaiah had in mind?

A Christian should get very nervous when the flag and the cross start holding hands. This is not a romance we want to encourage.

And the *ursprache* continues to echo within each one of us, telling us that things aren't right, that we're up against something very old,

and very deep,

and very wide,

and very, very powerful.

For a growing number of people in our world, it appears that many Christians support some of the very things Jesus came to set people free from.



It's written in Genesis that when Cain killed Abel, God said to Cain, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground."<sup>15</sup>

God can hear Abel's blood?

Blood that cries out?

To understand this cry, the noise that it makes across human history, and its importance to the times we live in, we have to go back to the first book of the Bible, the book of Exodus.<sup>16</sup>

