



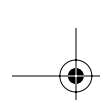
Foreword

For those of us who accept Randy White's invitation to experience God's "lab of the Spirit," it means taking the offramp to the little community of Lowell in downtown Fresno, California, where Randy and Tina White have lived for a little less than 1 percent of all history since Christ. This is where Randy has been going to school.

Many years ago the assistant superintendent of the Seattle public schools told me that, in choosing between competing applicants for school principal positions, it is critical to discern the difference between the person who has twenty years of experience and the person who has one experience twenty times. Randy epitomizes the gift of acting, reflecting and then learning from experience. His neighbors are his teachers and this book models what we might call "mission in reverse." The community is teacher; he is the learner.

When the Russian missionaries came to Alaska in the eighteenth century, they noticed that when the Eskimos or Aleut villagers were able to kill a whale or large animals, they ate, of course, but placed some of the meat, bone and blood down in the water as a sacrifice to the god who had shown mercy to them by making these giant animals sacrifice their own lives to keep these vulnerable people alive generation after generation. The Russian missionaries documented the fact that the Holy Spirit was there long before they got there,





teaching the people the doctrine of sacrifice and other important truths. The missionaries' new message was "we know the name of this God." He visited us once. His name is Jesus. The gospel spread like wildfire over Alaska as a result. Michael Oleksa documents that in his book *Orthodox Alaska: A Theology of Mission*.

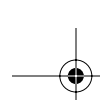
Like those Russian missionaries of old, Randy knows that the Spirit of God was active in the inner city long before he and Tina got there. He sees assets and builds on them. Of all the people he introduced me to in this book, the one I think I'll never forget is a little waiflike girl with the name Eternity, who frankly smelled like hell while doing crafts with twenty other kids around their dining room table. The Whites know what incarnation means: to live vulnerably while hungering for righteousness and seeking shalom, the justice and peace of God.

This book brought back memories. My Napoleon—the teen in the Fresno gang, with the surprising interest in international politics and our nation's China policy—was my Chicago gang neighbor Jim Lane, the leader of our neighborhood gang called TJO. I found him in a bookstore reading on China. Jim had committed a felony to gain his exemption from the draft and the Vietnam War. He lived in our home for a while.

Between the onramps and the speed bumps, the neighborhood has taken the stained glass off Scripture. It turns out to be a dialogue between Isaiah or Paul and a living, changing community. I remember we used to have Bible quizzes we called "sword drills," but I don't ever recall "smashing giant cockroaches" with my big, black Bible like Randy did. It may horrify some to think the Bible can be put to such use, but it is no surprise to me.

It struck me as I read this book that Randy has a lot in common with Vincent Donovan, who wrote of his seventeen-year safari among the Masai tribal communities in Kenya in his book *Christianity Rediscovered*. Donovan writes that "every theology or theory must be based





on previous missionary experience, and that any theory or theology which is not based on previous experience is empty words, of use to no one.”¹ Like Donovan, Randy does not see the planting of the church as the chief goal of his mission. Churches are, in fact, signs of and agents for the kingdom of God—which is a set of values and a view of reality that comes from Jesus and Scripture. This book is not about strategies and programs for churches to “take our cities.” In the spirit of the incarnation, it is about being present in a community and living in a human scale relationship to the people and systems that impact people in the city.

I know Randy as a scholar with a doctorate, but I also know him as a poet with sensitivities I could only imagine. I perceive that there is a growing gulf in the church today between the “mission and purpose-driven” forms of Christianity, and those for whom the incarnation of Jesus is both message and model. Jesus chose twelve “that they might be *with* him,” according to Mark 3:14 (NIV, emphasis mine). My sense is that Jesus spent 50 percent of his working three years with twelve people, precisely because he believed that discipleship is something to be taught and something to be caught. When I read Randy’s stories of encounters over so many years, I don’t hear him strategizing for InterVarsity or laying down bold tracks for students in mission. I hear a compelling call to an urban community: Come and be with Jesus Christ, in relationship to these broken and troubled neighbors. It’s not rocket science with Randy; it sounds more like the psalmist who wrote: “Blessed be the LORD, / for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me / when I was beset as a city under seige” (Ps 31:21).

Ray Bakke

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