At the Nexus of Postcolonial Theology and Anthropology: Mennonite Missionaries Ben Eidse and Jacob Loewen

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In his autobiographical book *Educating Tiger,* missionary anthropologist Jacob Loewen introduces his chapter on "conversion" with the epigraph: "It takes time for a man's stomach to be converted."[1] He then relates the story of a "notorious local medicine m[a]n, a recognized drunk" in an Indigenous Panamanian community, who made "a commitment to Christ" and was baptized into the local church. Loewen remained somewhat skeptical of the man's sincerity. When he and a colleague returned to Panama the following summer and saw the man lying drunk in a ditch, Loewen asked the pastor of the church how they would discipline the man. The pastor replied:

> Tiger, please stay out of this one. You have never been a slave to liquor like some of us have. . . . You have to recognize, Tiger, that it takes time for a conversion to reach the stomach of a drunkard. We are praying for the man, and we are telling him that one of these days . . . [h]is system will rebel against it. . . . His stomach will have been converted.[2]

Within a year, the man's stomach rebelled against alcohol and "was converted." This incident, unfolding in the years 1961–1963, caused Loewen to rethink his notion of conversion as a single event initiated

by an individual and instead to consider how this young church was regarding and practicing conversion as a process supported and enabled by a community. Another missionary anthropologist, Ben Eidse, who first went to what was then the Belgian Congo in 1953, found he too needed to study the local culture to understand its beliefs and practices, namely, concerning sorcery and the spirit world of the Lunda-Chokwe, before he could introduce them to an all-encompassing biblical discipleship in a culturally acceptable manner.[3] This paper examines how these two Mennonite missionaries used their theological and social scientific (namely, anthropological) understandings to define the need for local theologies as a central component of their missionary work.[4]

Eidse and Loewen were anomalies in a post-WWII era in which German-speaking Mennonites in Canada became increasingly aware of ethnic others and questioned their responsibility to them. Some Mennonites opted for quietly living their faith values, some for producing English radio programs, and others for overtly proselytizing, but often without considering how to bridge cultural differences. Others, influenced by an ethos of post-war volunteerism, debated whether to do relief or mission work, or, as some put it, whether to save the body or the soul. Eidse and Loewen's ability to affirm cultural difference, their willingness to learn from cultural others, and their awareness of the impact of asymmetrical power relations differed significantly from many of their missionary peers in the 1950s. Most importantly, they pursued ever more education while some of their peers considered "being called of God" a sufficient qualification for the missionary enterprise.[5] These differences suggest that Eidse and Loewen's anthropological studies fundamentally shaped their theology and missionary activity, an activity in which they perceived themselves to be "mere" catalysts. An overview of their lives and writings, a discussion of their postcolonial stance, particularly with respect to what postcolonial missiologist Paul Hiebert calls "the excluded middle," and a query into how their Anabaptist Mennonite heritage moulded them not only provide further insight into the nature of their missionary activity, but, most significantly, reveal the growing role of anthropology in their intercultural work.[6]

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen Biographically

Although Loewen (1922–2006) and Eidse (1928–2018) were Mennonites of relatively the same era, their commitment to creating what they called Indigenous churches and contextualized theologies

occurred in both parallel and differing ways. Both were already committed to preparing for intercultural ministries as young men, so undertook training at Bible schools, and actively shared their Christian faith with those around them through denominational outreach. Both were subsequently given an approximately five-year mission assignment in the Global South. There they discovered that anthropological and linguistic education were needed to supplement their theological training and to enable a Bible translation approach known as "dynamic equivalence." As a result, both pursued undergraduate- and graduate-level education. Loewen studied anthropology in state-supported institutions early in his missionary work, while Eidse took New Testament studies in church-related institutions and worked with anthropologists, but only pursued doctoral studies near the end of his career. Both completed doctoral dissertations, but also ensured that their wives, whom they regarded as co-workers, had educational opportunities.

Despite these commonalities, Loewen and Eidse's pathways took very different trajectories after their first several years of missionary activity. Loewen had a brief period of missionary work in Colombia and Panama before becoming a translations consultant who oversaw some four hundred Bible translations worldwide. Eidse spent some thirty years working with the Lunda-Chokwe of southwestern Congo, and though well-schooled in biblical languages, was involved in only one Bible translation project, but helped found one hundred churches in the Congo.[7] Both stood out from their contemporaries in their vision for, and commitment to, indigenization of the church, but while Eidse was affirmed by his denominational constituency, Loewen was not. A more detailed biographical overview of each missionary anthropologist offers insight into how their vision for indigenization distinguished them from many missionary peers at a critical juncture, when North American Mennonites were becoming more active in the world beyond their insular communities and colonized peoples were challenging and overturning colonial rule across much of the Global South.

Jacob Loewen was known as an anthropologist, linguist, missionary, Bible translation consultant, counsellor, and writer who became a committed Anabaptist later in life.[8] Born in Russia, his family initially moved to Kronsgart, Manitoba (1929), where Jacob had a religious conversion experience at age ten, and then to Yarrow, British Columbia (1934), where he was baptized into the local Mennonite Brethren (MB) church in 1939.[9] Though he grew up ensconced in a traditional Mennonite community, Loewen was not well accepted by his peers and struggled with self-esteem. His educational path was not continuous, but it was focused on training for intercultural

ministries. Lacking accessible high school training, he moved into the workforce after Grade 8, but nevertheless completed the Yarrow MB Bible school's five-year program from 1937 to 1942, followed by a year of public high school. During a year in alternative wartime service in Toronto, he attended an evening Missionary Medical Training School. Returning to British Columbia, he worked with the West Coast Children's Mission, an outreach arm of the Mennonite Brethren in British Columbia's Fraser Valley, and was ordained as a minister by the Yarrow MB Church in 1944. After only two years of further study, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, in 1947. Then Loewen and his wife Anne, whom he had married in 1945, took Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) courses in preparation for a five-and-a-half-year mission assignment in Colombia for which both were ordained by the MB Mission Board.[10] He subsequently earned a Master's (1954) and a PhD (1958) in the Linguistics Department at the University of Washington, since the Department of Anthropology would not accept him because he was a missionary.[11] Nevertheless, he studied anthropology specifically "to be better equipped to understand the tribal culture, mythology, and belief systems" for effective work in intercultural contexts.[12]

While awaiting another Mission Board assignment, Loewen taught anthropology, linguistics, and missions at Tabor College (1958–1964). Summers, Loewen and fellow missionary Daniel Wirsche would return to Panama to focus on literacy with the Waunana, who had followed the MB missionaries from Colombia to Panama, when Protestant missionaries had been barred from Colombia. Given his broader perspective obtained through his anthropological studies, Loewen was also invited by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) "to analyze . . . interracial Mennonite-Indian conflicts in Paraguay."[13] With further assignments from the MB Mission Board not forthcoming, Loewen became a translations consultant (1964–1984), initially with the American Bible Society in South America (1964–1970), and then with the United Bible Society for East Central Africa (1970–1978) and later in West Africa (1979–1984). Loewen's attempts to move control for translation projects from expatriates to local churches resulted in his forced retirement from the United Bible Society. In retirement, he continued publishing reflective, autobiographical works and shared his vision for learning from traditional cultures, but his efforts were not well received by evangelicals, and particularly not by Mennonite Brethren in Canada's Fraser Valley.[14]

Ben Eidse was known as a committed Anabaptist, missionary, Bible translator, culturally sensitive teacher, Bible college

administrator, and a counsellor with a pastoral heart.[15] The twelfth of twenty children born into a rural Kleine Gemeinde home at Rosenort, Manitoba, he wanted to become a teacher, so his father sent him to Steinbach Bible Academy for Grade 10, where he could study the conscientious-objector values of his Anabaptist ancestors.[16] His father's attempts to turn him into a gentleman farmer by keeping him home the following year were foiled when Ben continued studying on his own: personal evangelism courses from Moody Bible Institute, memorizing Bible verses while driving the tractor, and studying Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.[17] After his year at home, Eidse returned to Steinbach Bible Academy for Grade 11 and focused on missions, having sensed a call at an Academy conference to what was then known as "foreign missions," as distinguished from "home missions."[18] His missionary activity, however, began in western Canada, when, as a twenty-one-year-old, he headed to remote settlements in Saskatchewan. Here he led Bible studies in Ukrainian homes, held Daily Vacation Bible School classes for children, participated in weekend evening street meetings, and played guitar in Sunday morning church services at a nearby First Nations settlement, all under the auspices of the Western Gospel Mission.[19] Through this outreach work, Eidse says, he "learned to appreciate native culture" and felt he was preparing "for crossing cultures overseas."[20]

Eidse's move into "foreign missions" occurred just three years after graduating from Steinbach Bible Institute in 1950. Eidse married Steinbach classmate Helen Reimer in 1952 after she completed nursing training, and the following year they headed to the Belgian Congo with their newborn infant, Hope, the first of four daughters. They went as the first overseas missionaries of the newly organized Evangelical Mennonite Church Mission Board in conjunction with the inter-Mennonite Congo Inland Mission (founded in 1912), now known as the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission.[21] From its inception, the organization placed a strong emphasis on developing self-supporting and self-propagating churches.[22] The Eidses built a medical-church-education centre in the Kamayala-Kahemba region in southwestern Belgian Congo, and learned what their family called "the heart language" and proverbs of the Lunda-Chokwe people, as they immersed themselves in the culture.[23] Ben and Helen worked as a team in what they referred to as a "spiritual battle against sorcery and corruption."[24] In 1969, Eidse was asked by the American Bible Society to collaborate with a team that included a local pastor, an anthropologist, and a folklorist to translate the Bible into modern, dynamic Chokwe, a task completed in 1982.[25] The translation team

was later asked to prepare a study guide on sorcery and Christian discipleship.

During periodic returns to North America, either for furlough or due to illness or political unrest in the Congo, Eidse continued his formal education.[26] He completed a BA in psychology at Goshen College (1959) and a Master of Arts in New Testament Theology at Wheaton Graduate School in Chicago (1960). He also asked Helen to take an anthropology course and discuss the concepts with him daily, as the course did not fit his schedule. After some thirty years in the Congo, Eidse was appointed president of Steinbach Bible Institute (later Steinbach Bible College) and helped the college achieve accreditation, a significant building expansion, financial stability, and a stronger expression of its Anabaptist roots.[27] In 1992, he enrolled in the Missions Department at the University of Edinburgh, where he took courses in anthropology. His own anthropological research on Lunda-Chokwe beliefs and their interrelationship with biblical discipleship was the basis for his doctoral thesis.

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen through their Publications

Loewen and Eidse's publications provide significant insight into how they integrated their theological and anthropological understandings. Loewen's *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective* (1975) and his autobiographical *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey* (2000)[28] are central to this discussion as they reprint, summarize, and expand on his 350 articles on missions and Bible translation in various church and scholarly publications.[29] These works reveal the growing role of anthropology in his missionary endeavours.

Culture and Human Values offers a collection of Loewen's articles published between 1961 and 1970 related to communication within cultures and in intercultural contexts.[30] Loewen's anthropological training is evident in explorations of the ontology and cosmology or spiritual world of Indigenous peoples in Central and South America, since many of Loewen's contemporaries, particularly those without anthropological training, shied away from exploring this aspect of traditional beliefs and practices. These articles also recognize that missionaries bring their own culture with them, that the Christian message missionaries bring will result in re-evaluation of cultural practices, and that literacy is a vital tool for empowering marginalized peoples. Loewen's autobiographical *Educating Tiger* provides a brief chronology of his life, but essentially deals thematically with his growing understanding of concepts like

conversion, truth, and sharing the faith, as well as "his pilgrimage toward peace, Anabaptism, and mission."[31] The book was the third of what Loewen called his "three testimonies," which he wrote after a serious stroke. The other two included one "directed to the church that produced [him] (*Only the Sword of the Spirit*), and another directed to [his] fellow missionaries and Christians (*The Bible in Cross-Cultural Perspective*)."[32] After retirement, Loewen also initiated a Yarrow Research Committee in 1998, which published several historical volumes focused on Mennonites in Yarrow, including one titled *First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley (1890–1960)*, again exemplifying Loewen's commitment to understanding the history and culture of Indigenous peoples.[33]

By comparison, Eidse has a much smaller, though not inconsequential, set of writings. Most were published as reports in church and mission periodicals, in addition to his autobiographical *Light the World* (2012), and his published dissertation, *The Disciple and Sorcery* (2015).[34] His early writings are found in his denominational Mennonite periodical, *The Messenger*. The first of these already clearly articulates his resolve to create what he calls Indigenous churches, a visionary stance in an era in which many missionaries were content to replicate North American ecclesiastical and theological models and Western modes of thinking.[35] In "Congo Bound," written in 1963, some ten years after the Eidse family first went to the Belgian Congo, Eidse states that "our work"

> will consist mainly of counselling and evangelism. Discussions with our pastors, overseers, teaching evangelists, and lay people will focus on questions vital to a strong indigenous church. Typical topics will be finances, strengthening believers in the faith, church discipline, preparation of lay people for an effective witness, development of leadership, etc.[36]

Eidse's focus on training of and collaboration with local believers runs through subsequent reports in church and mission periodicals in the 1960s.[37] Notable in articles between 1963 and 1967 is the emphasis on fostering local and regional Congolese church leadership to oversee worship services, evangelism, instruction of young converts, and weekly offerings.[38] Other articles demonstrate how Eidse encouraged Indigenous Chokwe expressions of Christianity in music, particularly in the composition of Indigenous hymns, drama, and the written word.[39] His articles on Bible translation, furthermore, affirm the need for a re-translation into idiomatic Chokwe applying a "dynamic equivalence" principle, an approach that expresses ideas in language easily understood by present-day speakers of the language.[40] This move toward indigenization in the church

was occurring shortly after Congo achieved independence from Belgium in 1960, but also in the context of severe political unrest and intertribal tensions fostered by foreign intervention on the part of the United States and the Soviet Union. It paralleled Congolese agitation for greater autonomy within their churches, yet Eidse's indigenization efforts came from a longstanding vision for, and commitment to, nurturing culturally relevant churches.[41]

The Eidses' autobiographical *Light the World: The Ben and Helen Eidse Story as Told to Faith Eidse* begins with their early faith formation, then moves chronologically through their years of missionary service in the Congo and work at Steinbach Bible College. The book offers insights into dealing with the everyday realities of political unrest, revolutions, and serious personal health issues. It also demonstrates the application of Anabaptist principles to issues such as creating community and reconciling leaders, along with postcolonial issues such as empowering the powerless. Lastly, it offers descriptions of how anthropological understandings enabled culturally appropriate ways of conducting research and applying findings.

Eidse's *The Disciple and Sorcery: The Lunda-Chokwe View* is a version of his doctoral thesis. Based on collaborative research with anthropologists Stanley Yoder and Rachel Fretz, and local Congolese pastors, along with follow-up interviews by Eidse, the work consists of two main parts. Part I, titled "The Lunda-Chokwe Traditional Worldview and Implications for Biblical Discipleship," examines traditional Lunda-Chokwe oral literature and beliefs concerning ancestors and sorcery ("rituals intended to cause harm"), and Part II compares Lunda-Chokwe traditional and Lunda-Chokwe Christian world views on well-being and healing, and other theological issues, but also situates the study in historic Anabaptist perspective.[42] Eidse concludes that this "thorough study" enabled the development of "a culturally relevant biblical discipleship," i.e., a local, contextualized theology.[43]

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen as Postcolonialists

Although the term "postcolonial theology" emerged only in the 1970s when Loewen and Eidse were already working at developing contextualized theologies and churches, they well understood its basic tenet: the need to examine, critique, and negotiate "structures of power, dominant systems, and embedded ideologies . . . in order to make social transformations that recognize and validate the perspectives of marginalized peoples, cultures, and identities."[44] Eidse

and Loewen were certainly not the first who attempted to foster a contextualized Christianity and particularly to develop a postcolonial theology. Instead, as Mennonite anthropologist and postcolonial missiologist Paul Hiebert (1932–2007) demonstrates, the church has wrestled with how to "adapt to the culture in which it finds itself" throughout history. Hiebert also notes that "in the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries, including Mennonites, became increasingly identified with European colonialism," and an evolutionary perspective on culture that supported a belief in the superiority of Western culture.[45]

In reaction to this easy identification with colonialism and Western culture, missionaries Henry Venn (1796–1873) and Rufus Anderson (1796–1880) sought to develop a strategy of contextualization that would integrate their missionizing in Asia into local cultures, and counter Western missionary practices that kept locals dependent and subservient through handouts and servant roles.[46] In the 1850s Venn and Anderson argued, as Eidse would over a century later, that "the goal of missions is the planting of self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. When this is achieved the missionaries should disband and go home."[47] Although there were American Mennonite missiologists, like Hiebert, who supported and practiced this approach, Eidse and Loewen were among the first Canadian Mennonite missionary anthropologists in the mid-1950s to work actively for what became known as "contextualization," a term introduced around 1972 after the term "indigenization" became associated both with colonialism and the suggestion that Western forms of ecclesiastical structure, worship and ritual, and theology were normative.[48]

For Eidse, indigenization implied partnering with the African church in becoming autonomous from its colonial moorings. In his 1979 paper "AIMM and the Autonomous Mennonite Churches of Zaire," as the Congo was called at that time, Eidse discusses the dialogue among theology, culture, and ecclesial administrative structures necessary for obtaining that level of autonomy.[49] Presented at an international, inter-Mennonite evaluative consultation, Eidse drew attention to what it means to be part of a biblically based global Christianity, yet to be rooted in a local culture. He emphasized the need for administrative structures that would allow for the emergence of an autonomous Zairian church in which the missionary serves as a temporary facilitator. Although presented formally only in 1979, the seeds of these ideas were already present in Eidse's 1963 vision of helping create an Indigenous, i.e., culturally contextualized, Congolese church according to the three-self (self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating) formula.[50]

In those same years, Loewen became acutely aware of embedded ideologies when he attempted to assist a fledging Waunana church in Panama in becoming a truly Indigenous church. He realized that he "had to learn to leave [his] home church agenda at home," as he was "only truly helpful when [he] served as a catalyst . . . [since] then [he] could be of help to set in motion indigenous efforts that truly met local needs and built God's kingdom there."[51] It was Loewen's awareness of the agenda of the MB Board of Missions—to transplant a North American model of "church"—that motivated him and his co-workers to foster a church that was independent of close oversight by expatriates and the MB Board of Missions in Panama in the 1960s.[52]

A significant component of the approach of Loewen and his colleague Dan Wirsche to promoting the independence and empowerment of the Panamanian church was to practice minimal supervision. They chose to visit this church only in summers, when Loewen was free from teaching responsibilities at Tabor College. This allowed the new church to use its own cultural pathways in resolving issues during the remainder of the year. One of these issues was the process of Bible translation. Instead of assuming this was the prerogative of the formally educated missionary, it was left intentionally in the hands of a young Panamanian translator. The translator would "take his translation problems to church meetings," explain them, and "then the whole congregation would pray: 'Lord, if you had spoken this word in *Waun meu* . . . in the first place, how would you have said it?'" On the basis of the ensuing "group consensus," the translation would be considered "a direct and authoritative message from God."[53] Loewen adopted this prayer—"God, how would you have said this . . . ?"—in his subsequent work as a language consultant.

Loewen's description of this Bible translation process exemplifies what Paul Hiebert identifies as missing in the three-self formula, namely, the fourth self: self-theologizing, the process by which Indigenous churches "engaged in their own theological reflection" to avoid "simply adopt[ing] theologies formulated in the West."[54] However, Loewen's "listening to the culture" and refusal to replicate the North American model differed so significantly from his MB mission board's vision that he terminated his work with them. Yet, a former Mission Board member, who admits he "was resistant" to Loewen and Wirsche's approach to mission, states, that "the church in Panama today stands as a witness to the effectiveness of the catalyst approach."[55]

Similarly, when Eidse encouraged the use of Indigenous musical forms of expression in the church and fostered local and regional

Congolese church leadership, including appointing one hundred elders in small village churches in the 1960s, he was unequivocally challenging the ways in which Western thought, and sometimes unreflective behaviours, had dominated worship styles, theological interpretation, and church administrative structures in intercultural contexts.[56] Like fellow missionary to the Congo Donovan G. Unruh, Eidse regarded the process of becoming "a truly autonomous church" as involving: "1. The emergence of responsible and capable leadership, 2. Development of doctrine and ritual practices reflecting the cultural milieu, and 3. The emergence of a financially independent church" based on "the Pauline principle of temporary involvement and withdrawal" by the missionary.[57]

Eidse's 1979 paper on building autonomous African churches was postcolonial in even more significant ways. He argued that contextualization "focuses not only on the cultural and the social, as did the earlier concept of 'indigenization,' but also on the hermeneutical, political, economic, ethical and ecological," i.e., that contextualization needs to address the totality of life.[58] This broader focus is particularly evident when Eidse confronts the ways in which missionaries have practiced ethnic distancing, and specifically the economic disparity and social barriers between missionaries and their African colleagues. Eidse highlights the need for missionaries to abandon asymmetrical relations and to nurture genuine friendships with Zairians. But he also addresses asymmetrical relations amongst Zairians who favour cultural fault lines based on clan and tribal loyalties over genuine intercultural community within the church. These are all decidedly postcolonial ways of thinking and questioning.

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen as Anthropologists

To a large extent, it was Eidse and Loewen's study of anthropology that created their postcolonial vision for effectively nurturing an all-encompassing conversion to Christianity that reflected its localized cultural context. Their study had taught them not only in-depth listening to cultural contexts, but also a thoughtful, collaborative application of what they had learned. And both helped to influence the next generation through that vision: Loewen through his extensive publications and presentations, and Eidse by challenging fellow EMC missionaries at missions conferences.[59]

Eidse and Loewen are not alone in regarding anthropology as the ideal partner for developing theologies and churches rooted in their cultural environment. Missiologist Gustav Warneck already made

this point in 1879, when the field of anthropology was only in its infancy.[60] A century later, Catholic theologian Robert Schreiter argued that it is the social sciences, and particularly anthropology, rather than philosophy, that should "play the primary role of dialogue partner with the theology shaped" in intercultural contexts.[61]

It is not surprising that postcolonial missiologists like Schreiter and Paul Hiebert turned to anthropologist Clifford Geertz's understanding of culture, religion, and research methodology when searching for a theoretical model.[62] Geertz regarded culture as a total way of life that is understandable only through a comprehensive, inductive study. His perspective on religion was also holistic. He argued that "religion addresses intellectual, physical, and moral problems of existential meaning," that those meanings may be culture-specific, since "they arise out of social use . . . and finally, that meaning is materially embodied in symbols, acts, and rituals."[63] Geertz's view of religion, and, in fact, all of culture, as symbolic and all-encompassing was an ideal model for missionaries undertaking a serious study of a culture. Like Geertz, Eidse and Loewen realized that surface manifestations of culture may in fact be an overlay for deeper meanings that are understandable only through an in-depth study, or "thick description," in order to "gain access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live, so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them."[64]

Gaining access to the conceptual world of local people, however, does not occur automatically. As Loewen illustrates, it needs to be learned. In *Educating Tiger* he describes his three successive models of mission, revealing that he initially ignored the conceptual worlds of others. He claims that in his youth, "as an ardent nondenominational soulwinner who consistently and consciously tried to hide his German Mennonite background," he was taught "to use the Bible to club sinners over the head with its message" by employing some 150 memorized Bible verses to counter arguments against converting to Christianity.[65] In the second phase, he and his wife attempted to use what they called a hook to bait people into converting to Christianity, and so Colombians who visited their mission clinic would not be seen for medical issues before they had listened to a sermon. However, in the third phase, he realized that the missionary was to be essentially a learner, so for the next thirty years probing the conceptual world of others became his central focus.

As anthropologists, Eidse and Loewen concluded that the conceptual world of cultural others could most effectively be accessed through studying their oral literature: their myths, fables, and proverbs. Eidse's research on Lunda-Chokwe proverbs, for example, exemplifies the importance of understanding the genre through which

a local people learns and expresses ideas central to its culture. Unlike those missionaries who wanted to "share the simple gospel," Eidse discovered that the Lunda-Chokwe preferred to learn significant "truths" through metaphor.[66] Eidse, moreover, gained insight into how to research proverbs from his wife Helen's anthropology notes, so he conducted interviews together with local pastors in nearby, friendly villages during the Simba rebellion of 1964–65. Discovering the richness of their proverbs, Eidse would consult with local pastors, asking for proverbs relevant to a specific biblical passage, then use them in his sermons. In time, Eidse became known as "the man who knows our proverbs" and some Lunda-Chokwe even claimed they were "getting a better understanding of their own culture through Christ."[67]

Loewen similarly discovered that it was through a specific genre, in this case myths, that he could best understand the Enlhet (Lengua) and Choco, especially their notions of personhood. He initially undertook the study of Enlhet myths when asked to mediate the tensions between Mennonite colonies and the semi-nomadic Enlhet of Paraguay whose proximity to Mennonite farming communities had resulted in a change to a sedentary lifestyle. Through this study, Loewen gained insight into the root of these intercultural tensions: a significant difference in communication styles between Mennonites and the Enlhet. The Mennonites, who were quite direct in their communication styles, claimed the Enlhet were passive, evasive, and even downright dishonest, but Loewen's suggestion that the Mennonites were racist was not well received.[68] According to Loewen, the Mennonites failed to grasp the Enlhet concept of one's "innermost," which functions as a moral centre and must be calm before one can speak, even about dramatic occurrences.[69] Given these insights, Loewen thus provides a strong rationale for the study of Indigenous cosmologies by those involved in mission.[70]

Eidse similarly studied various genres of Lunda-Chokwe oral narrative such as myths and folktales to probe their view of personhood and their realms of the metaphysical. Lunda-Chokwe concepts of personhood, not surprisingly, intertwine biological, socio-political, and cosmological dimensions. Through his interviews, Eidse learned that personhood involved the development of a sense of self, character formation, gender roles, familial relationships, and "practicing the presence" of the living, the dead, and the unborn—or "the debt they owe to one another."[71] Expressed as "well-being" and "interconnectedness," these ideas had a strong sociological dimension and were applicable to "'fertility,' continuity, and survival of society as a whole" and suggest the breadth required of a localized theology.[72] Eidse also discusses the type of knowledge that the creator,

Kalunga, has given the Lunda-Chokwe: knowledge of nature, natural phenomena, supernatural beings and events, the causes of illnesses and their cures, the types and nature of spirits, and the sources of power used by sorcerers. Sorcerers are thought to have powers to see things in both the physical and supernatural realms that are not accessible to everyone else. No doubt, this belief in sorcerers' extra-human powers underlies the pervasive fear of sorcery among the Lunda-Chokwe. However, Eidse uses the term "sorcery" very deliberately, as the Lunda-Chokwe find that term acceptable for the process that disrupts well-being and interconnectedness. Eidse's culturally sensitive choice of terminology contrasts with that of a Mennonite Brethren missionary working in another area of the Congo in the same era, who, although providing a thorough ethnographic description, nevertheless used pejorative terms like "idol-and-spirit-worshipping African . . . witchcraft . . . accepted civilization," and contends that "the gospel . . . contradicts tribal customs."[73] Thus, her terminology reveals the limited understanding of, and respect for, another culture one gains *without* a thorough anthropological study.

Eidse credits cultural anthropology with facilitating significant insights into traditional Lunda-Chokwe beliefs and practices, since it allowed him to combine "emic" perspectives—that is a description of "the world from the standpoint of the culture being studied without passing judgement"—with "etic" perspectives, which examine "another culture in terms of the analyst's own basic assumption and conceptual categories."[74] This approach was also compatible with the inductive, biblical, theological approach Eidse had used as an Anabaptist New Testament scholar, as it involved examining texts without a preconceived template. Using an anthropological lens for intercultural study thus allowed Eidse and Loewen a deeper understanding of the peoples they were studying.[75] They learned to use culturally appropriate research methods, to study culture holistically, to focus on those genre of oral narrative through which a culture learns about its personhood and spiritual/moral centre, but also to use culturally respectful terms, to appreciate figurative, imaginative "truth," rather than literal, simple truth, and most importantly, to affirm that each culture has the building blocks necessary for creating a contextualized theology. They advocated this decidedly postcolonial stance as a necessary foundation for self-theologizing.

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen as Scholars of "the Excluded Middle"

Most significant in their in-depth anthropological probe into the spiritual realms of these cultures is the fact that Eidse and Loewen address what Paul Hiebert calls "the excluded middle," a philosophical tenet which suggests that in arguing which of two polar opposites is true or false, one often ignores significant information that lies between the ideas assumed to be in opposition.[76] Hiebert, the son of second-generation missionary parents in India, states that Westerners look for scientific explanations of natural phenomena "that are directly experienced," and see religion as a separate sphere that "deals with the ultimate questions of the origin, purpose, and destiny of the individual, a society, and the universe."[77] But, he continues, Westerners ignore "the questions of the uncertainty of the future, the crises of present life and the unknowns of the past." Because they see these events as "'accidents,' 'luck' or 'unforeseeable events' [and] hence unexplainable," Westerners ignore explanations "in terms of ancestors, demons, witches and local gods, or in terms of magic and astrology."[78] Hiebert admits that as a Westerner, he too had relegated "the confrontation with spirits that appeared so natural a part of Christ's ministry . . . to a separate world of the miraculous—far from ordinary everyday experience."[79] His Western perspective had allowed him to categorize healing as a scientific, medical process, whereas the Indian villagers who asked him to pray for the healing of a child categorized healing as a religious process for which rituals such as prayer should suffice.

Loewen provides a similarly telling example of how his Western view blinded him from seeing "the excluded middle" while working with the Waunana in Colombia. Deeply troubled by "the Waunana's unquestioning belief that all their illnesses resulted from evil spirits," and wanting to provide a "scientific explanation" for malaria, Loewen ordered a microscope, but when he showed locals the malarial parasite through the microscope, they simply regarded this as visible confirmation of the existence of the spirits, and added, "we knew they were blue."[80] That Loewen did not truly understand the spirit world was made painfully clear to him when he was told not to pray for a Choco woman in Panama who was ill, "Because you don't [truly] believe" in the Holy Spirit's power to heal. Loewen's study of a Choco myth about a man losing his soul had revealed local beliefs concerning souls and the spirit world as a whole, especially, the fear of spirits, yet local Choco sensed that he did not truly understand their spiritual world, nor the real power of the Holy Spirit in which he claimed to believe.[81] Like Hiebert, Loewen became

deeply aware of the limits of Western missionaries with respect to spirit phenomena and healing, and concluded that Westerners have much to learn about the spirit world from Indigenous peoples.[82]

Loewen also attributes his eventual ability to attend to the excluded middle to hearing American Quaker author and theologian Elton Trueblood's (1900–1994) discussion on having "keys" to the lives of others (see Matthew 16:19), and to reading psychoanalyst Theodor Reik's (1888–1969) *Listening with the Third Ear* (1948)."[83] Loewen credits these works with helping him to listen carefully to the local culture and its world view, rather than assuming he could "barge in," identify, and solve others' problems.[84]

It was the local perspectives on personhood that could have become the excluded middle, yet both Eidse and Loewen used them to help develop a culturally relevant theology. Eidse's probing of Lunda-Chokwe beliefs about personhood and the human-spiritual continuum among the Lunda-Chokwe was sufficiently in-depth for those who converted to Christianity to discontinue the practice of searching for the source of a presumed sorcery attack and even to lose their fear of sorcery.[85] Similarly, Loewen's research on the four souls and notion of soul loss among the Choco of Panama, the four foci of the Enlhet "innermost," and his anthropological approach to understanding the Nivaclé in Paraguay enabled radical transformations. In working with the Nivaclé, who said they wanted to "become a human being too"—like their Mennonite neighbours—Loewen found that it was both listening to them and talking about how he himself had struggled with "becoming a person" that paved the way for a peace-making ceremony. The result was a group conversion of two hundred Nivaclé to Christianity one evening.[86]

Similarly, awareness of, and respect for, the social structure of a culture helped Eidse enable continuity in cultural traditions as he helped form churches and counsel individuals. His understanding of Lunda-Chokwe gender roles, particularly the complementary roles of males and females in this matriarchal society where women were highly respected, ensured that female leaders were appointed in each new church along with male leaders. Women past childbearing years would "take more active part in rituals, leading singing and dancing groups,"[87] and the church would deal effectively with infertility in a culture that valued women for both their productive and reproductive powers.[88] This was a marked contrast with the patriarchal structure of his own denomination in Canada, the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, which only began formally addressing the issue of women in leadership in 2016.[89] Furthermore, understanding the importance the Lunda-Chokwe placed on "individual and clan well-being . . . the transmission of life . . . health . . . good

social relationships and political control . . . [and] prosperity"[90] enabled Eidse to incorporate traditional beliefs that were compatible with biblical concepts into his teaching and preaching and to help develop a theology and ecclesiastical structure that were locally relevant.

Lastly, with respect to culturally perceived modes of epistemology, Eidse and Loewen perpetually interacted with peoples whose sense of the spirit world challenged their own understanding of the Holy Spirit, the power of prayer, and the ability of dreams to provide insight into social and personal issues. Not surprisingly, Eidse and Loewen listened not only to people, but also to God's Spirit and often used fervent prayer to resolve issues such as biblical translation puzzles, personal and intercultural conflict, serious health concerns, and safety issues during times of political unrest. Both prayer and a thorough anthropological study of the excluded middle enabled them to avoid "the continuance of paternalistic history in which outsiders" determine "what would be 'best' for a local culture" and, moreover, allowed them to foster greater "openness and sensitivity to a local situation."[91]

Contextualizing Eidse and Loewen as Anabaptist Mennonites

Though their study of anthropology and linguistics was crucial, equally significant for both Eidse and Loewen was their commitment to Anabaptist theology. For Eidse this seemed to be an uncomplicated process, since studies in a Mennonite high school and at Goshen College had offered exposure to Anabaptist teachings. Working alongside American Mennonite missionaries committed to their Anabaptist roots would also have fostered that stance. For Loewen, on the other hand, it was a lifelong journey. Loewen, in fact, calls his growing understanding a "pilgrimage from ethnic Mennonitism to North American soul-winning evangelicalism to a discovery of an Anabaptist vision" that takes seriously "a life of discipleship that includes a non-resistant lifestyle" and engages in what he calls "a life restricted to the sword of the Spirit."[92] And so, while Eidse already embraced the term discipleship at the outset of his missionary involvement, Loewen struggled with the nature of conversion before he was able to see—late in life—that it was a process that was exemplified by discipleship.

Loewen, as already mentioned, had a troubled relationship with his Mennonite Brethren denomination, differing significantly with its theological stance, namely, its easy adoption of an almost fundamentalist, evangelical ethos. For him, that rather casual dismissal

of central tenets of Anabaptism such as a nonresistant lifestyle was truly an instance of a sending church ignoring its own excluded middle.[93] He first encountered his MB church's peace principles when his church "dusted off its doctrine of nonresistance at the beginning of World War II."[94] Doing alternative service in Toronto, he knew he was against war, but had no real understanding of why, so he resolved to study the peace position. Those plans were shelved when he went to Colombia, because "as a missionary [he] was working to reconcile the 'heathen' to God, and that seemed like a very positive kind of peacemaking."[95] When faced with violence against Protestants stemming from the Colombian civil war ("La Violencia," 1948–58), he used "every verbal, moral, legal and diplomatic weapon available to define 'our' right to operate as a peace church" but realized that " peace principles could never be merely a wartime issue" as his church had taught, but needed to permeate all of life.[96] Unable to continue fighting the Colombian government for the MB mission properties in good conscience, he notified his mission board, which was displeased. It was only later, while working for the United Bible Society, that he began to understand and apply peace principles as a way of life, and it was through a study of Menno Simons's writings and the example of Gandhi that he began to develop and apply his own "yardsticks for protest for conscience' sake."[97] Despite his commitment to Anabaptist peace principles, his denomination eventually regarded his universalistic perspective as too radically different from their belief in absolute truth, so they removed him from their membership roll.[98]

From his youth, Eidse avoided the fundamentalist concept of "conversion" that Loewen found so troubling, and chose instead, concepts more characteristic of Anabaptist theology: "follow[ing] Jesus," living "committed lives," and discipleship, with an emphasis on community and reconciliation.[99] His inclusion of a chapter on sixteenth-century Anabaptist origins in both his autobiography and dissertation places his thinking within a tradition of grounding his theology historically. However, his review of the 1962 Mennonite World Conference held in Kitchener, Ontario, clarifies how he defined some of the essentials of Anabaptism.[100] He lauded the "balance in the emphasis given to evangelism, missions, relief, and the peace witness" and that the conference was contributing to "brotherhood all over the world" and "a renewal of spiritual life of the church," but noted "several disturbing factors" such as delegates questioning biblical authority, endorsing the ecumenical movement, and urging Mennonites to get into politics.[101] Eidse's comments reveal that he was clearly on the evangelical end of the Anabaptist theological continuum, but he placed an emphasis on discipleship and community

rather than on the individualism characteristic of many Western evangelicals.

This rootedness in Anabaptism enabled both Eidse and Loewen to contextualize local theologies while remaining firmly planted within historic Christianity, thereby avoiding a simple affirmation of everything within a given local culture. They were, in fact, engaging in what Paul Hiebert would call critical contextualization: a thorough study of the culture, "a study of the scriptures related to the question at hand"—translated into the "cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture"—and an opportunity "for the people corporately to evaluate critically their own past customs in the light of their new biblical understandings, and to make decisions regarding their response to their new-found truths."[102] This process, Hiebert argues, allows Westerners, "with our extreme forms of individualism . . . to rediscover the corporate nature of the church." Critical contextualization thus illustrates Hiebert's understanding of the fourth self: self-theologizing, although within the parameters stated above.[103] Both Eidse and Loewen were working collaboratively, not only sharing the decision-making process with the local church, but, in fact, enabling the local cultures to embark on their own, independent decision-making process.

In comparison with other missionaries of their Mennonite denominational backgrounds of the mid-twentieth century, Eidse and Loewen stand out as pioneers of contextualization, both of ecclesiastical structure and praxis, and also of self-theologizing. As the first missionary sent by the newly formed EMC Board of Missions, Eidse was seconded to an inter-Mennonite mission, which had as its goal to make the local church self-sufficient and self-propagating, so he had considerably more freedom than Loewen, who went to Colombia and then Panama with an established MB Board of Missions and was expected to transplant a North American concept of church. Despite these differences, Eidse and Loewen shared a commitment to critical contextualization which differed radically from their denominational counterparts.

I contend that it was Eidse and Loewen's commitment to Anabaptist ideals—an inductive biblical theology approach, with a commitment to discipleship, the priesthood of all believers, active peacemaking, and a commitment to social justice—that motivated their in-depth anthropological research in an effort to build contextualized Christian communities. Not surprisingly both the Eidses and Loewen received a Lifetime Service Award from the Association of Anabaptist-Mennonite Missiologists, an organization that lauded their commitment to developing local theologies.[104]

Conclusion

Both Eidse and Loewen expressed their commitment to a postcolonial stance early in their intercultural work. That stance led to active participation in an "epistemological shift," a perspective that ultimately drove Eidse and Loewen to the study of anthropology.[105] Their commitment to a postcolonial missiology was evident in such acts as Loewen's attempts to limit expatriate and MB Board of Missions oversight of the Indigenous Panamanian church in the 1960s, and Eidse's 1963 vision for creating truly Indigenous churches based on Anabaptist theological principles. These acts were radical in that they signalled a significant shift in power from missionaries and especially from mission boards in urban North America to the local church, often a first-generation church in the Global South. Not only were Loewen and Eidse advocating for autonomous Indigenous churches that exhibited the "three-self formula," they were also actively supporting self-theologizing, a concept introduced by Paul Hiebert and explained by South African missiologist David Bosch who states that historically,

> theology was conducted *from above* as an elitist enterprise . . . [and] its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) was *philosophy*, and its main interlocutor the *educated non-believer*, [but] contextual theology is theology "*from below*," "from the underside of history," its main source (apart from Scripture and tradition) is the *social sciences*, and its main interlocutor the *poor* or the *culturally marginalized* [emphasis in the original].[106]

"Theology from below" entailed not only engaging local Bible translators, but also learning to understand and use non-Western epistemologies. As Bosch indicates, it was the social sciences that enabled postcolonial theologians to move from Western philosophical rationalism to theological and ecclesiastical contextualization. And for Loewen and Eidse, the social science of choice was unquestionably anthropology, as self-theologizing and creating a contextualized theology depended upon a thorough, comprehensive understanding of local culture.

Eidse and Loewen's study of anthropology was necessitated specifically by their encounter with Indigenous beliefs about the spirit world, and particularly the fear of malevolent spirits, in Panama and the Congo in the 1950s. Both Eidse and Loewen subsequently pursued anthropological study in order to facilitate understanding of the spiritual world, beings, and forces of peoples who did not compartmentalize their lives into binaries like sacred-secular, and whose notion of personhood, soul, or "innermost" was intimately

entwined with their conception of their spiritual world. In so doing, Eidse and Loewen began to examine what Paul Hiebert called "the excluded middle," culture-specific ways of thinking, knowing, and being that differed from a Western worldview based on Platonic dualism. Unique too was Eidse and Loewen's careful attention to the oral literature of the peoples with whom they worked, in order to gain all-encompassing insight into Indigenous worldviews. It was the recognition of this excluded middle that enabled Eidse and Loewen, subsequently, to act as catalysts for "developing holistic theologies that deal with all of life," which, as Hiebert says, "includes a theology of God in human history . . . of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world; and of suffering, misfortune and death . . . [and also] an awareness of God in natural history."[107]

Eidse and Loewen's efforts to nurture a holistic theology were always tempered by their commitment to what Hiebert refers to as "critical contextualization," and which Schreiter recognizes as a dialectical process, "moving back and forth among the various aspects of gospel, church and culture."[108] In Eidse's case, his earlier intercultural experience in Saskatchewan and his long-standing commitment to Anabaptist beliefs about discipleship and the priesthood of all believers led him to work collaboratively with the Lunda-Chokwe, to use their proverbs in preaching, to use their notions of interconnectedness and well-being to convey how biblical discipleship could be lived within their culture, and to communicate how the Holy Spirit empowers those who fear the disruptions of sorcery. For Loewen, there was a significant growth in cultural sensitivity and understanding of spirituality, particularly of the Holy Spirit, as he helped countless language groups address the question "God, how would you have said this if you had spoken in our language in the first place?" His affirmation of Indigenous knowledge and leadership, his probing questions of both Indigenes and settlers, and his prolific publications on missions and anthropology that influenced generations of missiologists, like Paul Hiebert, all remain as a testament to a visionary committed to being a better learner, listener, and reconciler in culturally sensitive ways.

In this discussion I have argued that Eidse and Loewen were postcolonial theologians who innovatively used anthropology to shape their missionary practice, but that they were simultaneously driven to anthropology by their missionary experience and Anabaptist-Mennonite theology. It was this ongoing dialogue between inductive anthropological research on the local culture, active engagement with Anabaptist distinctives, commitment to biblical theology, and efforts to assist the local church in critical contextualization that

distinguished them from their Canadian Mennonite missionary counterparts. This dialectic empowered them to serve as catalysts for developing contextualized theologies and ecclesiastical structures and practices that were biblically based, yet historically and culturally grounded.

Notes

I am grateful to Jacob Loewen for encouraging me to become an anthropologist and to Ben Eidse who enabled the release from teaching responsibilities that allowed me to complete doctoral studies in folklore and anthropology. I also thank Kerry Fast for her insightful questions and comments on earlier drafts of this paper, Elizabeth Behrens for her constructive comments, and the following for supplying important sources: Kit Stone, Ferriss Hodgett Library of Grenfell Campus, Memorial University of Newfoundland; Dr. Anicka Fast, School of Theology, Boston University; and archivist Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.

1. Jacob A. Loewen, *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey* (Hillsboro, KS: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000), 25.
2. Ibid.
3. The Belgian Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960, but only changed its name in 1964 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, sometimes referred to as the DRC, but often merely as the Congo.
4. For discussion on the terms "mission," first introduced by Ignatius of Loyola in the mid-sixteenth century, "missiology," generally attributed to Gustav Warneck (1834–1910), and "intercultural theology," see Paul Kollman, "At the Origins of Mission and Missiology: A Study in the Dynamics of Religious Language," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79:2 (2011): 425–458; Frank Wijsen, "Introduction," in *Global Christianity: Contested Claims*, ed. Frank Wijsen and Robert Schreiter (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 10; and Hans Kasdorf, "The Legacy of Gustav Warneck," *International Bulletin* 3 (1980): 102–107.
5. See T. D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939–1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 327–381, for a discussion of Mennonite missionizing at home and throughout the world.
6. Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology: An International Review* 10:1 (1982): 35–47.
7. Faith Eidse, *Light the World: The Ben and Helen Eidse Story as Told to Faith Eidse* (Vancouver, BC: Friesen Press, 2012), 131. When the Bible Society hired Eidse on the basis of his knowledge of Greek and Chokwe, he studied Hebrew at Princeton to prepare for translation of the Old Testament.
8. Biographical details of Loewen's life are based primarily on the following sources: Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 1–23, 279–301; Harvey G. Neufeldt, "The Legacy of Jacob A. Loewen," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 3:3 (2008): 141–148; and *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), s.v. "Loewen, Jacob A. (1992–2006)," by Harvey Neufeldt,

https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Loewen,_Jacob_A._(1922-2006)&oldid=143642.

[9] Yarrow MB Church, founded in 1929, was the first MB church in British Columbia. Edwin Lenzmann, "Yarrow Mennonite Brethren Church," in *Yarrow's Pioneers and Settlers*, ed. Esther Epp Harder, Edwin Lenzmann, and Elmer Wiens, http://www.yarrowbc.ca/church/mbmennonitechurch.html.

[10] William Loewen, Gladys Loewen, Sharon Loewen Shepherd, and DJ Pauls, "Who's Cooking the Borscht? A Perspective on Social Identity," in *Mothering Mennonite*, ed. Rachel Epp Buller and Kerry Fast (Bradford, ON: Demeter, 2013), 135. The authors state, "the [Mennonite Brethren Church] mission policy on women's ordination was reversed in 1957 to ensure that women did not have equal privileges to men."

[11] William A. Smalley, preface to *Culture and Human Values: Christian Intervention in Anthropological Perspective*, by Jacob A. Loewen (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), x.

[12] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 297, 123.

[13] Neufeldt, "Loewen, Jacob A." Since its formation in 1885, Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services International (MBMSI) has undergone several reformulations and name changes. For purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the organization as MB Mission; see its entry in GAMEO, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Mennonite_Brethren_Missions/Services_International_(Mennonite_Brethren_Church).

[14] When Loewen died in 2006, he was survived by his wife, four children, six grandchildren, and two step-grandchildren. According to a telephone conversation with Loewen's daughter Gladys, his children all have graduate degrees and work with the socially disadvantaged in North America, perpetuating the values they learned from their parents, although they have not found a hospitable niche in the organized church (Feb. 28, 2020).

[15] Biographical details of Eidse's life are based on the following sources: GAMEO, s.v. "Eidse, Ben F. (1928–2018)," by Alf Redekopp, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Eidse,_Ben_F._(1928-2018)&oldid=160804; His Family, "Ben Eidse, 1928–2018" (obituary), *EMC Messenger*, July 2018, 31, https://emcmessenger.ca/2018/06/08/ben-eidse/; "Ben Eidse: Obituary," mySteinbach, https://www.mysteinbach.ca/obituaries/710/ben-eidse/; Eidse, *Light the World*.

[16] The Kleine Gemeinde (literally, Little Church) originated in Russia in 1812 and migrated to North America in 1874–75. In Manitoba it was renamed the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC) in 1952 and the Evangelical Mennonite Conference in 1960.

[17] Eidse, *Light the World*, 27.

[18] Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 329. Regehr notes that "home" and "foreign" missions were generally distinguished geographically, and that "cross-cultural missions to Native people, or to the urban poor in North America," might fall into either category. Eidse, *Light the World*, 21.

[19] The Western Gospel Mission was organized by Helen Eidse's uncle, Ben D. Reimer, to reach out to the remote Ukrainian, Russian Doukhobor, and First Nations communities where sons of Mennonite families were working in sawmills. The Kleine Gemeinde Church sponsors were later joined by the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church. See Eidse, *Light the World*, 24.

[20] See Eidse, *Light the World*, 25.

[21] See Abe Unger, "The Development of Missions in the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Kleinegemeinde, ca 1812–1962)," in *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1812–1962* (Steinbach, MB: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), for a discussion of how the Eidses themselves "were instrumental in assisting" with the formation of an EMC mission board, 131–132.

[22] J. L., *The Cry of the Congo: The Story of the Congo Inland Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Congo Inland Mission). Written sometime after the early 1920s, this booklet shows the goal of this inter-Mennonite mission was to be "working toward a self-supporting as well as self-propagating church" by missionaries with a thorough preparation for "the responsibilities lying ahead," 18, 15. Erik Kumedisa describes how Mennonite denominations collaborated, yet also parcelled out the parts of the Congo, and also how Congolese churches gained independence from North American mission boards. That story is beyond the scope of this paper; see "Mennonite Churches in Central Africa" in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts, Global Mennonite History Series: Africa*, general eds. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006), 45–94.

[23] "Ben Eidse," *EMC Messenger*.

[24] "Ben Eidse," mySteinbach.

[25] Redekopp, "Eidse, Ben F."

[26] According to AIMM Executive Coordinator Rod Hollinger-Janzen, the Eidses were in the Congo the following years: 10/53–3/57; 4/61–9/61; 3/63–6/67; 5/69–6/73; 9/75–4/79; 6/80–12/82. Email to the author Apr. 4, 2020.

[27] Accreditation with the American Association of Bible Colleges (AABC; renamed The Association for Biblical Higher Education, or ABHE).

[28] Loewen claims he wrote his first book on his mission work in Colombia and Panama—*Onze ieashte Missjounsreiz* (Abbotsford, BC: QL Trust, 1997)—in his Low German mother tongue to gain confidence in writing. He identifies himself as its author in Low German, namely as Jash Leewe. *Onze ieashte*, 8–9.

[29] See e.g., Loewen, *Culture and Human Values*. See also Loewen's *The Bible in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

[30] Loewen, "Introduction," in *Culture and Human Values*, xvii.

[31] Perry Klassen, review of *Educating Tiger: My Spiritual and Intellectual Journey*, by Jacob A. Loewen (Hillsboro, KS: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2000), *Direction* 30:1 (2001): 111–12.

[32] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 2.

[33] Harvey Neufeldt, Ruth Derksen Siemens, and Robert Martens, eds. *First Nations and First Settlers in the Fraser Valley (1890–1960)* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004).

[34] Ben Eidse, *The Disciple and Sorcery: The Lunda-Chokwe View* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

[35] Issues of *The Messenger* between 1963 and 1970 had only one other reference to the term "indigenous" by another EMC missionary and a significant number of references to "pagan" cultures, implying that the local culture cannot enter into fruitful discussion with theology. See e.g., "British Honduras, A Small But Needy Country," by missionary Henry Klassen, *The Messenger* 4:1 (Jan. 7, 1966): 4.

[36] Eidse, "Congo Bound," *The Messenger*, Feb. 22, 1963, 3.

[37] Based on a perusal of *The Messenger* (1963–1970) at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, and the *CIM Messenger* (1966–1972), *ZMM Messenger* (39:4 and 40:1, 1972), and *AIMM Messenger* (1972–1980), with thanks for access to digitized versions by Dr. Anicka Fast.

[38] Ben and Helen Eidse, Hope, Faith, Charity and Grace, "Kamayala Keynotes," *The Messenger*, June 28, 1963, 3; The Eidses, "Life at Kamayala, Congo," *The Messenger*, June 9, 1967, 4; "Gleanings from B. Eidses Letters," *The Messenger*, May 27, 1966, 5. An earlier article, "Kamayala Keynotes," *The Messenger*, June 28, 1963, 3, noted that due to insufficient funds "payments to our primary school teachers" had been incomplete, so fiscal accountability was a matter of concern.

[39] Ben Eidse, "Visible Charisma," *Zaire Missionary Messenger* 39:4 (Winter 1972): 18–19. See also "Translation Work Progresses" by The Eidses, Ben Helen and girls, *The Messenger*, May 8, 1970, 6.

[40] See The Eidses, "Translation Work Progresses," as well as Ben Eidse's "Missionary Ben Eidse Explains Procedure," *Congo Mennonite Messenger* 39:2 (Summer 1971): 14–15, and Eidse's "Experiences of a Translator," *Africa Inter-Mennonite Messenger* 41:2 (Summer 1973): 19–20. See also Eidse, *Light the World*, chap. 19.

[41] The Eidses. "Eidses Back at Kamayala," *The Messenger*, May 15, 1964, 3. See also Eidse, *Light the World*, chaps. 14–16. That Eidse's commitment to fostering indigeneity represented his own longstanding vision for the church and was not merely a reaction to Congolese anticolonialism and independence issues was confirmed by his daughter and son-in-law, John and Charity Schellenberg. Telephone conversation, Mar. 9, 2021.

[42] Several chapters of the autobiography appear to be repeated in the version of the dissertation sent to me.

[43] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, xvii.

[44] David Bradnick, "Postcolonial Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, ed. George Thomas Kurian (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011).

[45] GAMEO, s.v. "Indigenization," by Paul G. Hiebert, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Indigenization&oldid=92097.

[46] Wilbert R. Shenk, "Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn: A Special Relationship?" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 4 (1981): 170.

[47] Editor, "Second E.M.C. Orientation School," *The Messenger*, Sept. 13, 1968, 6.

[48] American Mennonite Wilbert R. Shenk, Senior Professor of Mission History and Contemporary Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, is a notable exception to the colonialist approach critiqued by Hiebert, as was Jim Bertsche, a fellow missionary of Eidse in the Congo. GAMEO, s.v. "Contextualization," by Wilbert R. Shenk, https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Contextualization&oldid=91513.

[49] Ben Eidse, "AIMM and the Autonomous Mennonite Churches of Zaire," *AIMM Messenger* 47:1 (1979): 10–12. Between 1971 and 1997 the Democratic Republic of the Congo was called Zaire.

[50] Eidse, "Congo Bound."

[51] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 301.

[52] Neufeldt, "Loewen, Jacob A."

[53] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 66.

[54] Rochelle Cathcart and Mike Nichols, "Self Theology, Global Theology, and Missional Theology in the Writings of Paul G. Hiebert," *Trinity Journal* 30:2 (2009): 210.

[55] John B. Toews, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and North America* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1983), 279.

[56] Through work of the Eidses, as well as other missionaries throughout the Congo, by 2019, the Democratic Republic of the Congo had 225,000 baptized Mennonites, the fourth-largest population of Mennonites in the world, next to the United States, Ethiopia, and India. See Abigail Theano-Pudwill, "There are more Mennonites in the Congo than Canada," CHVN Radio, Oct. 22, 2019, https://chvnradio.com/articles/mennonite-stronghold-in-the-congo.

[57] Donovan G. Unruh, "Toward a Truly Autonomous African church," *Congo Missionary Messenger* 28:3 (1970): 10, 13.

[58] Eidse, "AIMM and the Autonomous," 11.

[59] Editor, "Second E.M.C. Orientation School," 6. See also Sue Barkman, *Ever-widening Circles: EMC Missions Silver Jubilee 1953–1978* (Steinbach, MB: Board of Missions, 1978), 37, 114, 125, for examples of the impact of Eidse's challenge to the EMC mission board and missionaries to strive for contextualization.

[60] Kasdorf, "The Legacy of Gustav Warneck," 105.

[61] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), xii and 42–73. See also Schreiter's "Anthropology and Faith: Challenges to Missiology," *Missiology: An International Review* 19:3 (1991): 283–294. Mennonite missionary Elmer S. Miller, in fact, says he was "driven" to anthropology by missionary experience among the Toba in Argentina, but found anthropology "to be more relevant, intellectually stimulating, and practical" than theology; see *Nurturing Doubt: From Mennonite Missionary to Anthropologist in the Argentine Chaco* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 113.

[62] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 42–49. Also see Hiebert's "Missions and Anthropology: A Love/Hate Relationship," *Missiology: An International Review* 6:2 (1978): 165–180, on a "paradigm shift in epistemology," from so-called objective scientific explanations to reflexive, postcolonial model (171). Also see Hiebert's "Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism," *Missiology: An International Review* 19:3 (1991): 263–281, Hiebert's "Critical Issues in the Social Sciences and their Implications for Mission Studies," *Missiology: An International Review* 24:1 (1996): 65–82, and Schreiter, "Anthropology and Faith."

[63] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87–125. Quotation from Simon Yarrow, "Religion, Belief, and Society: Anthropological Approaches," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 48.

[64] Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 6, 24.

[65] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 79, 215.

[66] Mary Koop, "With Gospel in Japan," *The Messenger*, Apr 5, 1963, 3, 7, says she is bringing "the simple way of salvation using the life of Christ pictures to illustrate the Gospel" to Japan. This was surprising to me as during my month-long stay in Japan in 1970, the trip that turned me into an anthropologist, I heard that the Japanese frequently take as long as a year to study the Christian faith before making a commitment to it.

[67] Eidse, *Light the World*, 92. Not having time in his schedule at Wheaton for an anthropology course, Eidse sent his wife to take the course and they discussed her learnings after each class.
[68] Neufeldt, "Loewen, Jacob A."
[69] Loewen, "Lengua Indians and their 'Innermost,'" in *Culture and Human Values*, 134–155.
[70] Loewen was so strongly convinced of the necessity of studying indigenous myths that he published a series of six articles in *Practical Anthropology* in 1969. Articles ranged from "Myth and Mission: Should a Missionary Study Tribal Myths?" (147–150), to ones on the structure and function of myth, concluding with "Myth as an Aid to Missions" (185–192). *Practical Anthropology* 16 (1969). Cited in Neufeldt, "Legacy," 147.
[71] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, 26, quoting J. V. Taylor, *Primal Vision*, 1963.
[72] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, 27.
[73] Mrs. H. T. Esau. *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 297–306.
[74] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, xxvi–xxvii. Eidse credits Paul G. Hiebert's *Cultural Anthropology* textbook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 1983), with introducing him to the concept of emic and etic perspectives on culture, terms first coined in 1954 by linguist Kenneth Pike of Wycliffe Bible Translators.
[75] My perusal of *The Messenger*, Eidse's denominational paper, for the years 1963–1970 revealed no substantive example of other missionaries studying the local culture, especially from an anthropological perspective.
[76] Hiebert, "Flaw of the Excluded Middle."
[77] Hiebert, "Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 44.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Hiebert, "Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 35.
[80] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 117–119. Loewen states that the first person to see the parasites through the microscope ran to tell others, saying, "Come quickly because Jaco ([Loewen's] tribal name) has nailed the fever spirits onto the glass!" Another local, not knowing that Loewen had stained the parasites blue, said, "You know, we always knew that fever spirits had blue noses, but we didn't know that those beggars were all blue and that they were that tiny."
[81] Loewen, "The Choco and their Spirit World," in *Culture and Human Values*, 127–134.
[82] Loewen, "The Choco", 134.
[83] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 45, 82.
[84] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 79.
[85] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, 127.
[86] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 26–29. For further discussions on group conversion, see Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), and John P. Bowen, "What Happened Next? Vincent Donovan, Thirty-five Years On," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33:2 (2009): 79–82.
[87] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, 22.
[88] Eidse, *Light the World*, 206.
[89] Inspiring Partnership in Ministry Task Force, "Women in Leadership: Hearing Fears and Offering Thoughts," *EMC Messenger*, March 2020, 6–10, https://emcmessenger.ca/2020/04/13/features-april-2020-2/.

[90] Eidse, *Disciple and Sorcery*, 102.
[91] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 39.
[92] Neufeldt, "Legacy," 146.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Loewen, *Educating Tiger*, 279.
[95] Loewen, *Educating Tiger,* 280.
[96] Loewen, *Educating Tiger,* 281.
[97] Loewen, *Educating Tiger,* 284.
[98] Neufeldt, "Legacy," 143, 146.
[99] Eidse, *Light the World*, 14.
[100] Ben Eidse, "Impressions of Seventh Mennonite World Conference," *The Bond* 9:4 (1962): 2–4.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Paul G. Hiebert. "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11:2 (1987): 109–110. See also Hiebert's "Cultural Relativism and Theological Absolutes," *Direction* 2:1 (1973): 2–6.
[103] Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," 293. In his later writings, Hiebert opts for the concept of "missional theology," to challenge the extreme forms of theological pluralism that could, and sometimes did, emerge from uncritical contextualization. See, e.g., Paul G. Hiebert, "Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism," *Missiology:* An *International Review* 19:3 (1991): 263–281, and Tite Tiénou and Paul G. Hiebert, "Missional Theology," *Missiology:* An *International Review* 34:2 (2006): 219–238.
[104] "Ben Eidse," *EMC Messenger*.
[105] See Paul G. Hiebert, "The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift," *TSF Bulletin* 8:5 (May-June 1985): 12–18; also, David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 423.
[106] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 423.
[107] Hiebert, "Flaw of the Excluded Middle," 45–46.
[108] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 20; Hiebert, "Critical contextualization."